

THE
MYSTERIES OF LONDON.

BY
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WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE TRAVELLING-CARRIAGE.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening of the 2nd of November, 1826, that a travelling-carriage stopped, on its way to London, to change horses at the principal hotel in the little town of Staines.

The inmates of the vehicle were two ladies—an elderly domestic in livery and a female attendant occupied the box.

The night was clear, fine, and frosty: the moon shone brightly; and the carriage lamps throw a strong glare to a considerable distance in front of the vehicle.

The active ostlers speedily unharnessed the four

wearied steeds, and substituted as many fresh one in their place: the two postboys leapt into their saddles; the landlaid cried "All right!"—and the carriage rolled rapidly away from the inn, the horses' shoes striking fire against the stones.

"If there be anything particularly calculated to raise the spirits," said one lady to the other, a few minutes after the chariot had left the peaceful town behind, "it is travelling upon such a beautiful night as this."

"I am delighted to observe that you *are* in good spirits this evening, my dear Lady Hatfield," was the reply. "After passing four long months at Sir Ralph Walsingham's country seat, London will present fresh attractions for your ladyship."

"My dear Miss Mordaunt," returned Lady Hat-

field, in a serious tone, "you are aware that I am indifferent to those formal parties and ceremonial assemblies which are reckoned amongst the pleasures of the fashionable world; and I can assure you that had not my uncle purported to return to London in a few days, my own inclinations would have urged me to prolong my stay at Walsingham Manor."

"For my part," said Miss Mordaunt, "I am quite delighted with the idea of hastening back to the great metropolis. A summer in the country is only tolerable because each day brings one nearer to the enjoyments of a winter in town. But really, my dear Lady Hatfield, you are not reasonable. Rich, young, and beautiful as you are—your own mistress—and with the handsomest man in England dying to lay his coronet at your feet——"

"I shall never marry, Julia," hastily interrupted Lady Hatfield. "Pray let us change the conversation. A few minutes ago I was in excellent spirits; and now——"

She paused—and a deep sigh escaped her bosom. "Did I not say that you were quite unreasonable?" exclaimed her companion. "Here am I—five years older than yourself,—for I do not mind telling you, my dear friend, that I shall never see thirty again;—and yet I have not renounced the idea of changing my condition. I know that I am neither so good-looking nor so wealthy as you;—still I have my little ambition. Sir Christopher Blunt would deem himself honoured were I to smile graciously upon him; but my brother, the lieutenant—who, by the by, expects his captaincy in a few days, thanks to the interest of your kind uncle Sir Ralph—declares that if ever I marry a mere knight, he will never speak to me again."

Lady Hatfield had fallen into a profound reverie, and paid not the slightest regard to the confidential outpourings of her garrulous companion.

Miss Mordaunt, who laboured under the pleasing impression that Lady Hatfield's silence was occasioned by the deep interest which she took in the present topic, continued to rattle away with her tongue as fast as the carriage did with its wheels.

"I am sure it was a very great act of kindness in you to ask me to spend the winter with you in London; for as papa is compelled to reside in Ireland, in consequence of the unsettled state of his tenantry, I should have been under the necessity of returning to the Emerald Isle, after my four months' visit with you to Walsingham Manor, had you not taken that compassion on me. But let us speak of yourself, dear Lady Hatfield. Without a soul in the world to control your actions—with the means of procuring every enjoyment—and with Lord Ellingham going mad on your account——"

"Julia," said Lady Hatfield, with a start,—"again I beseech you to drop this subject. And, as you will be my companion for some months to come, let me now, once for all, enjoin you to abstain from such topics. As you cannot read the secrets of my heart, pray bear in mind the fact that many a light word uttered thoughtlessly and with no malicious intent, may touch a chord that will thrill," she added calmly, but bitterly, "to the inmost recesses of my soul."

"Oh! my dear Lady Hatfield," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, who, in spite of her loquacity, was a very good-natured person, "I am rejoiced that you have given me this warning. And how foolish of me not to have observed—what indeed I now remember—that

the topic of Love never was agreeable to you. To be sure! It was during the sermon upon the felicity of the wedded state, that you fainted and were taken into the vestry!"

Lady Hatfield writhed in mental agony; and bitterly at that moment did she repent the invitation which she had given her thoughtless companion to pass the winter with her in London.

The carriage had now reached the little town of Bedford, which it traversed without stopping; and continued its rapid way towards Hounslow.

But all of a sudden the course of the chariot was checked—as if by an unexpected impediment in the way; and the horses began to plunge frightfully.

At the same time the lady's-maid on the box uttered a dreadful scream.

Lady Hatfield drew down the window nearest to her: the chaise that moment came to a full stop; and a stern, but evidently disguised voice exclaimed, "Keep your horses quiet, you damned fools—and don't mind me! If you stir till I give you leave, I'll blow out the brains of both of you."

"Robbers!" shrieked Miss Mordaunt in a despairing tone: "Oh! what will become of us?"

Lady Hatfield looked from the window; and at the same instant a man, mounted on horseback, with a black mask over his countenance, and a pistol in each hand, was by the side of the vehicle.

"Villain!" cried the livery-servant on the box. "But you shall swing for this!"

"Perhaps I may," said the highwayman, coolly, though still speaking in a feigned tone, as is the custom with individuals of his profession upon such occasions as the one we are describing: "and if you attempt to move, old fellow, from where you are, an ounce of lead shall tumble you down from your perch. Beg pardon, ma'am," continued the robber, turning towards Lady Hatfield, who had shrunk back into the corner of the carriage the moment the desperado appeared at the window; "sorry to inconvenience you; but—your purse!"

Lady Hatfield handed the highwayman her reticule.

"Good!" said he, perceiving by its weight and a certain jingling sound which it sent forth, that it contained gold. "But you have a companion, ma'am—her purse!"

Miss Mordaunt complied with this demand, and implored the "good gentleman" not to murder her.

The highwayman gave no reply; but vouchsafed a most satisfactory proof of his intended forbearance in that respect, by putting spurs to his steed, and darting off like an arrow in the direction of Hounslow.

"Cowardly villains that you are!" ejaculated the livery-servant, hurling this reproach against the postboys.

"And what are you, old fool?" cried the postillion who rode the wheel-horse. "But he'll be nabbed yet."

"Drive on—drive on!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield from the window. "We are all frightened—and not hurt."

"Indeed, my dear," said Miss Mordaunt, as the carriage started off rapidly once more, "I am seriously hurt—grievously wounded!"

"You, Julia!" cried her ladyship, in unfeigned surprise.

"Yes—in pocket," was the answer, implying deep

vezation. "All the remainder of my quarter's allowance—"

"Oh! compose yourself on that head," interrupted Lady Hatfield. "You shall not be compelled to acquaint Mr. Mordaunt with your loss."

This assurance, conveying a promise of pecuniary assistance, materially tended to tranquillise the mind of Miss Mordaunt; but the event which had just occurred—apart from the mere robbery of her reticule—awoke the most painful reflections in the mind of Lady Hatfield.

"By the by," said Miss Mordaunt, after a short pause—for she never remained long silent,—“this audacious outrage reminds me of something your uncle Sir Ralph Walsingham was telling me one day, when you interrupted him in the middle. I think he informed me that about six or seven years ago—when you were only eighteen or nineteen—you were staying at your dear lamented father's country-house, where you were quite alone—for of course one does not call the servants anybody; when the mansion was broken into by robbers during the night—”

"Julia!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield, her whole frame fearfully convulsed by the powerful though useless efforts which she made to subdue her agitation: "never, I implore you, again allude to that dreadful event!"

"Well—I never will," said Miss Mordaunt. "And yet, if one must not speak of Love—nor yet of marriage—nor yet of midnight burglaries—"

"Nay—I was wrong to cut you short thus abruptly," remarked Lady Hatfield, now endeavouring to rob her prayer of the impotence with which her solemn earnestness of manner had invested it: "only, do choose some more enlivening topic after the fright which we have just experienced."

"The first thing to-morrow morning," said Miss Mordaunt, who had not noticed the full extent of the impression which her allusion to the burglary of some years back had made upon her companion—for Julia was too flippant, superficial, and volatile to pay much attention to the emotions of others,—“the first thing to-morrow morning we must give information to the Bow Street runners concerning this highway robbery: secondly, we must write to the landlord at Staines to tell him what a couple of cowardly fellows he has got in the shape of these postillions;—and thirdly, you must discharge old Mason, who is evidently incapable of protecting his mistress, much less her friends."

"Discharge old Mason!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield: "impossible! How could he have protected us! He is unarmed—whereas the highwayman flourished two large pistols, doubtless loaded. But here we are safe at Hounslow!"

The carriage drew up at the door of the hotel in this town; and the postillions immediately narrated the particulars of the robbery to the landlord and his attendant tribe of hangers-on.

"Well, this is fortunate!" cried the landlord, when the tale was told: "quite a God-send, as one may say."

"As how, please, sir?" exclaimed the elder postboy, astonished at the remark.

"Why—it happens that Dykes, the famous Bow Street officer, is in the hotel at this very instant," said the landlord. "John," he added, turning to a waiter who stood near, "beg Mr. Dykes to step this way."

"And what's Dykes doing down here?" asked the postboy, when the waiter had disappeared to execute the commission he had received.

"He's been investigating a 'cendiary fire," replied an ostler; for the landlord, disdaining to hold any farther converse with a postillion, had stepped up to the window to inquire whether the ladies chose to alight.

Having received a negative answer, accompanied with an intimation that the sooner the carriage was allowed to proceed the more agreeable it would be to Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt, the landlord returned towards the spot where the postillions, the hangers-on of the hotel, and other loungers were grouped together.

Mr. Dykes almost immediately afterwards made his appearance in the form of a tall, stout, heavy, but powerfully built man, shabby-genteel in his attire, and carrying a strong ash-stick in his hand.

The particulars of the highway robbery were described to him in a very few moments.

"How was the fellow dressed?" asked the officer.

"A black coat," said the first postboy.

"No—it was n't," cried the second.

"Then what was it?" demanded Mr. Dykes.

"I don't know—but I'm sure it was n't a black 'un," was the highly satisfactory answer.

"Describe his horse," said Dykes impatiently.

"Brown—switch tail—standing about fourteen hands—"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated the second postillion, interrupting his companion who had volunteered the explanation. "It was a light bay—the moon fell full upon it—so did the carriage-lights."

"Come, I see we are only losing time," cried the officer. "Which way did he go?"

"He galloped off in this direction," was the reply, which remained uncontradicted.

"Then he'll be in London to-night, whichever road he took," said Mr. Dykes. "If your ladies will give me a cast as far as town, I'll be after the villain. Perhaps he turned off to the left towards Hatton, and so over by Hanwell and then Shepherd's Bush; or else he made straight for Richmond, and so over into Surrey. But, one way or another, he's sure to be in London by midnight; and ten to one if I do n't pounce on him. My business is done down here; and I may just as well toddle back to-night as to-morrow morning."

The substance of these remarks was communicated to Lady Hatfield, who could not well do otherwise than accord a seat on the box to Mr. Dykes, Charlotte, the lady's-maid, removing to the interior of the carriage.

These arrangements having been effected, the vehicle pursued its way; and shortly after eleven o'clock it drew up at the door of a mansion on Piccadilly Hill.

Mr. Dykes, having asked the ladies a few questions, promised to communicate the result of his efforts to capture the highwayman; and then took his departure.

Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt shortly retired to their respective bed-chambers: the latter to dream of the delights of London—the former to moisten her pillow with tears; for the recent adventure had awakened in her mind feelings of the most agonising description.

CHAPTER II.

TOM RAIN AND OLD DEATH.

It was about half-past eight on the following morning, when two individuals entered a public-house in White Hart Street, Drury Lane.

One was a man of about thirty years of age, with florid complexion, light hair, and red whiskers,—yet possessing a countenance which, viewed as a whole, was very far from disagreeable. His eyes were of a deep blue, and indicated not only good-humour, but a certain generosity of disposition, which was not impaired by an association with many less amiable qualities—such as a wild recklessness of character, an undaunted bravery, a love of perilous adventure, and a sad deficiency of principle on particular points, the nature of which will hereafter transpire. He was evidently proud of a very fine set of teeth, the brilliancy of which compensated for the somewhat coarse thickness of his lips; and the delicate whiteness of his hands showed that he did not earn his livelihood by any arduous labour. In person, he was about the middle-height—by no means inclined to corpulency—and yet possessing a well-knit frame, with a muscular power indicative of great physical strength. His dress partook of the half-sporting, half-rakish character—consisting of a high chimney-pot kind of hat, with very narrow brims, a checked blue silk neckerchief, fine linen, a buff waistcoat, cut-away Newmarket-style of green coat, drab-breeches, and top-boots. The proper name of this flash gentleman was Thomas Rainford; but his friends had taken the liberty of docking each word of a syllable; and he was invariably known as Tom Rain.

The other individual was an old man, of at least sixty, with white hair, but eyes of fire glaring from beneath a pair of thick, shaggy grey brows. He was upwards of six feet in height, and but little bowed by the weight of years which he bore. Having lost all his teeth, his mouth had fallen in, so as to form a complete angle, the depth of which was rendered the more remarkable by the extreme prominence of his hooked nose and his projecting chin. He was as thin as it was possible to be without having the bones actually protruding through the skin, which hung upon them like a tanned leather casing. He was dressed in a long grey surtout coat, reaching below his knees; a pair of shabby black trousers, very short; and black cloth gaiters fitting loosely over that description of shoes generally denominated high-lows. On his head he wore a greasy cap, with a large front; his linen was by no means of the cleanest; and his appearance altogether was excessively unprepossessing—if not absolutely revolting. What his real name was, very few of even his most intimate acquaintances were aware; for his dreadful emaciation of form had procured for him the frightful pseudonym of *Old Death*.

Tom Rain and his hideous companion entered the public-house in White Hart Street, nodded familiarly to the landlord, as they passed by the bar, and ascended the stairs to a private room on the first floor.

Having seated themselves at the table, Tom Rain began the conversation.

"Well, have you considered my proposal?" he asked.

"I have," replied the old man, in a deep sepulchral tone; "but I am cautious—very cautious, my good friend."

"So you told me when I saw you three days ago for the first time," observed Rain, impatiently. "But Tullock, the landlord of this place, is a pal of yours; and he knows me well too. Hasn't he satisfied you about me?"

"Well—well, I can't say that he has'n't," answered Old Death. "Still, a cautious man like me never says *yes*, in a hurry. Tullock knew you eight or nine years ago down in the country; and there's no doubt that you was then a right sort of blade."

"And so I am now!" cried Tom Rain, striking the table angrily with his clenched fist.

"Softly—softly, my good friend," said Old Death. "We shall agree better afterwards if we have a good understanding at first. I was going to observe that for some years Tullock loses sight of you; he comes up to town, takes this public, and doesn't even remember that there's such a fellow in existence as yourself until you make your appearance here a few days back."

"When he received me with open arms, and introduced me to you," added Tom Rain. "But go on: what next?"

"Ah! what next?" replied Old Death, with a horrible chuckle, that issued from his throat as if it came from the depths of a tomb. "Why—you frankly and candidly told me your intentions and views, I admit;—but you can't do without me—you can't do without me, my dear boy—and you know it!"

Again the hideous old man chuckled in his cavern-like tones.

"I never denied what you say," answered Tom Rain. "On the contrary, I am well aware that no one in my line can think of doing business about London, and making London his head-quarters, without your assistance."

"To be sure not!" said the old man, evidently pleased by this compliment. "I've had the monopoly of it all for this thirty years, and never once got into trouble. But then I do my business with caution—such caution! I've dealings with all that are worth having dealings with; and not one of them knows even where I live!"

"Only let me find a sure and ready-money market for my goods," exclaimed Tom Rain, "and I'll do more business with you than all the chaps you speak of put together."

"Well, I suppose, we must come to terms," said Old Death, after a short pause. "Tullock assures me that you were straightforward when he knew you in the country, and though time changes men's minds as well as their faces, I'll take it for granted that you're all right. You remember the conditions?"

"Not a word you uttered three days ago has escaped my memory," answered Rain.

"Good. When shall you commence business?"

"I opened my shop last night," replied Tom, with a hearty laugh.

"Nonsense!" cried the old man, fixing a glance of delight upon his new friend. "You don't mean to say that—In a word, is *this* yours?"

As he spoke, Old Death drew from his pocket the morning's newspaper, pointed to a particular advertisement, and held the journal towards his companion.

Tom Rain's countenance was overclouded for a moment; but almost immediately afterwards it expanded into an expression of mingled surprise and satisfaction; and snapping his fingers joyfully, he exclaimed, "Is it possible? could it have been *her*? Oh! this business is speedily settled!"

And rising from his seat, he rang the bell violently.

A pot-boy answered the summons.

"Pen, ink, and paper, and a messenger to carry a letter," said Tom Rain, with extraordinary rapidity of utterance.

The boy disappeared; and Old Death, recovering partially from the astonishment into which his companion's ejaculations and manner on reading the advertisement had thrown him, exclaimed, "What the devil are you after now?"

"You shall see in a moment," was the reply; "but I don't promise you any explanation of what you *will* see," he added with another hearty laugh.

The boy returned, bringing writing materials, and intimating that he was willing to be the bearer of the letter.

Tom Rain told him to wait; then, having hastily written a few lines upon a sheet of paper, he tossed the note over to Old Death, who read as follows:—

"Remember the night of the 27th of October, 1819;—and stop the inquiries instituted in respect to the little business referred to by the advertisement in this morning's *Times*."

"This is past all comprehension," exclaimed the old man, still keeping his eyes fixed upon the paper. "The note has not even a signature."

"It does not require one," coolly observed Tom Rain, as he snatched the letter from his companion, and proceeded to fold it up.

"And do you hope to crush the business by means of that scrap of writing?" asked Old Death, evidently perplexed what to think.

"I don't merely hope—I am certain of accomplishing my object," was the reply.

"Now mind you ain't deceiving yourself, Tom," said Old Death. "The man who has taken up the affair is persevering as a beaver and crafty as a fox. You may see that he is in earnest by the expedition he must have made to get the advertisement into this morning's paper. I should have hardly thought it possible to be done. However, done it is—and, though it gives no description of the person, yet it offers a good reward for his apprehension. No one knows what trivial circumstance may afford a trace; and—"

"Enough of this, old friend," cried Tom; and handing the letter, now duly folded, wafered, and directed, to the boy, he said, "Take this to the address written upon it: see if there's any answer; and I shall wait here till you come back. Look alive—and you'll earn a crown by the job."

The boy hastened away to execute the commission which he had received.

"And so that was your business, Master Tom?" observed Old Death, as soon as the messenger had disappeared. "Well—you have made a good beginning: it promises bright things."

"What! do you fancy that I have n't had plenty of experience down in the country?" cried Rainford. "Ah! I could tell you a tale or two—but no matter now."

"And the little business, Tom," inquired the old

man,—“did it turn out worth the trouble? The advertisement says—”

"Hark'ee, Master Death," exclaimed Rainford, firmly; "that business does not regard you. Our compact dates from this morning—"

"Oh! very good—very good!" interrupted Old Death, in a surly tone. "Be it as you say: but remember—if you *do* get into any trouble on account of this, you must n't expect me to help you out of it."

"Neither do I," answered Tom. "However, I am a generous chap in my way, and I do n't mind yielding to you in this instance; for you must suppose that I can see your drift plain enough. The advertisement says '*A purse containing a Bank-note for fifty pounds and eleven sovereigns, and a reticule containing a purse in which there were three ten-pound notes and sixteen sovereigns.*' This is accurate enough. The reticule I flung away: the two purses I kept—and here they are."

Thus speaking, Tom Rainford threw upon the table the objects last mentioned.

Old Death's eyes glared with a kind of savage joy as they caught a glimpse of the yellow metal and the flimsy paper through the net-work of the purses.

"Pretty things—pretty things!" he muttered between his toothless gums. "I think you'll do well, Tom."

"And I am sure I shall. But turn the money out on the table: you care more about the handling of it than I do."

Old Death "grinned horribly a ghastly smile," and lost no time in obeying the hint conveyed.

"Twenty-seven golden boys, and eighty pounds in Bank-notes," said the hideous man. "The gold is yours—that's part of our conditions: half the value of the Bank-notes is mine, for the risk and trouble in cashing them—that's also part and parcel of our conditions. So if I give you forty sovereigns—forty golden sovereigns, Tom—we shall be square."

"Just so," carelessly observed Rain.

Old Death produced a greasy leather bag from a pocket in the breast of his grey-coat, and counted thence the forty sovereigns on which he had laid such emphasis.

Tom Rain thrust the coin into his breeches' pocket without reckoning it; while his companion first secured the Bank-notes in the greasy bag, and then threw the two purses into the fire.

"You're a good fellow, Tom—a generous-hearted fellow—and I'm much pleased with you," said the old man. "I shall leave you now, as I have some little trifling matters to attend to in another part of the town. When you want me, you know where to leave a message."

"All right," ejaculated Tom Rainford, who did not appear over anxious to detain his new friend.

They accordingly separated—Old Death taking his departure, and the other remaining behind to await the return of his messenger.

It is necessary to state that when Old Death quitted the public-house, he was joined a few paces up the street by a sharp-looking, ill-clad youth of about fifteen, whose pale countenance, bright eyes, and restless glances denoted mental activity struggling against bad health.

Approaching the old man, the youth walked by his side without uttering a syllable.

"Jacob," said Death, after a brief pause, and sinking his voice to a whisper, "you saw that swell-looking chap who went into Tullock's with me just now. Well—I told you to be here this morning at a particular hour, on purpose that you *might* see him. He will be useful to me—very useful. But I must know more of him—and he is not the man to be pumped. Do you wait here, and watch him. Dog him about—find out where he goes—where he lives—whether he has a mistress or a wife, or neither—"

"Or both," added Jacob, with a low chuckle.

"Yes—any thing that concerns him, in fine," continued Old Death. "I am going to Toby Bunce's in the Dials, where I shall be for the next three or four hours if I'm wanted."

"Very good—I understand," said Jacob; and retracing his steps, he hid himself in a court which commanded a view of Tullock's public-house.

Let us now return to Tom Rain, who was waiting for the reappearance of his messenger.

It was shortly before ten when the pot-boy once more stood in his presence.

"Well?" said Rainford, interrogatively.

"I seed the lady herself," was the reply; "and I gived her the note. I thought it was somethink partickler—and so I told the flunkie I'd on'y deliver it n'to her hands."

"Ana how did she receive it?" asked Tom.

"I was showed into a parlour and told to wait. In a few minutes the door opened and in come a lady—such a splendid creatur! I never seed such a fine 'ooman in my life before. Our bar-gal's nothink to her! So I gived her the note: she looked at the writing on the outside, but did n't seem to know it. Then she opened the letter—and, my eye! did n't she give a start? I thought she'd have fell slap on her face. For a minute or so she could n't recover herself: at last she says, '*Tell the writer of this note that it shall be attended to*;'—and she put half-a-crown into my hand. That's all."

"I knew it would be so!" cried Tom Rain in a triumphant tone. "Here's the five shillings I promised you, my boy; and I do n't think you've made a bad morning's work of it."

The lad grinned a smile of satisfaction, and withdrew.

Rainford soon after descended to the bar, conversed for a few minutes with his friend Tullock, the landlord, and then took his departure—duly watched by Jacob.

He had reached the corner of Drury Lane, when he felt himself somewhat rudely tapped on the shoulder.

Turning hastily round, he was confronted by a tall stout man, who, without any ceremonial preface, exclaimed, "You're wanted, my good fellow."

"I know I am," replied Tom coolly, as he measured the stranger from head to foot with a calm but searching glance: "and I'm now on my way to the place where my presence is required."

"Just so," said the stout man: "because you are going to favour me with your company, that I may introduce you to a party who wishes to become better acquainted with you."

"Who's the friend you speak of?" asked Tom in an easy, off-hand kind of manner.

"Sir Walter Ferguson," was the reply. "So come along."

With these words, the stout man took Rainford's

arm and led him away to the Police Court in Bow Street.

Jacob, who was an unsuspected witness of the whole proceeding, immediately took the shortest way to Seven Dials.

CHAPTER III.

DOW STREET.

THE moment Mr. Dykes had lodged his prisoner in one of the cells attached to the court, he hurried off to Piccadilly Hill, and knocked loudly at the door of Lady Hatfield's residence.

Upon explaining the nature of his business to the domestic who answered the summons, he was admitted into an apartment where Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt almost immediately joined him.

Lady Hatfield was the orphan daughter of the Earl and Countess of Mauleverer. She was an only child: the proud title of Mauleverer had become extinct with the demise of her father; but the family property had devolved to her. She was in her twenty-fifth year, and surpassingly beautiful:—the style of her loveliness was fascinating and intellectual—rendered the more interesting, too, by the tinge of melancholy which characterised her countenance. Her eyes were large and of a deep blue: the soul sat enthroned on her pale and lofty forehead;—her smile, though always plaintively mournful, denoted amiability and kindness. In stature she was of the middle height; and, though in the least degree inclining to *embonpoint*, yet the fulness of her form marred not its lightness nor its grace. The bust was rounded in voluptuous luxuriance—and the hips were expanded;—but the waist was naturally small—the limbs tapered gradually downwards—and her step was so elastic, while her gait was easy though dignified, that even the most critical judge of female attractions could not have found it in his heart to cavil at her symmetry.

Miss Mordaunt was a lady who had seen thirty-five summers, although she would have gone into hysterics had any one suggested that such was really the fact. She was short, thin, and not particularly good-looking; for her hair was of so decided a red that it would have been a mockery instead of a compliment to term it auburn: her eyes were grey, and her nose suspiciously inclining to the species called "pug:"—but her complexion was good, her teeth well preserved and white, and her hand very beautifully formed. Thus, when she looked in her glass—which was as often as she passed near it—she mentally summed up the good and the bad points of her personal appearance, invariably striking a balance in favour of the first, and thence arriving at the very logical conclusion that she should yet succeed in escaping from a condition of single blessedness.

It was a little after eleven o'clock when Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt were informed that Mr. Dykes requested an immediate interview with them. Some event of that morning's occurrence had already produced a strange—an almost alarming effect upon Georgiana—such was Lady Hatfield's Christian name: and in order to regain her spirits—to recover indeed from a sudden shock which she had received—her ladyship had proposed an early airing in the carriage. To this Julia, who had some "shopping to do," readily assented. They had accordingly just completed their toilette for

the purpose, and were now waiting in the drawing-room for the arrival of the chariot, when the announcement of Mr. Dykes's name called such an ejaculation of anguish from Lady Hatfield's lips, that Miss Mordaunt was seriously alarmed.

But Georgiana,—the expression of whose countenance indicated for an instant the agony of a heart wounded to its very core,—subdued her emotions by a violent effort; and then, in answer to her friend's solicitous inquiries, attributed the temporary agitation she had experienced to a sudden pain passing through her head.

It was nevertheless with feelings of mingled terror and repugnance that Georgiana accompanied Julia to the room where the Bow Street officer awaited them.

Her very eye-lids quivered with suspense, when she found herself in the presence of the celebrated thief-taker.

"Well, ladies," exclaimed Mr. Dykes, rising from a chair, and making an awkward bow as they entered, "I've good news for you: the highwayman is——"

"Is——" repeated Georgiana, with nervous impatience.

"Is in custody, my lady; and all I now want——"

"Who is in custody?" demanded Georgiana, hope for a moment wildly animating her.

"The man that robbed you last night, my lady," answered the officer; "or else I'm dam——beg pardon—very much mistaken."

"But how do you know he is the same?" exclaimed Lady Hatfield. "Perhaps you may have erred—your suspicions may have misled you——"

"Ah! my lady," interrupted Dykes, totally mistaking the cause of Georgiana's warmth; "you surely ain't going to plead in favour of a chap that stopp'd you on the King's highway, and did then and there steal from your person and from the person of your friend——"

"Describe the individual whom you have arrested," said Lady Hatfield abruptly.

"To a nicety I will," answered the officer, who was now completely in his element. "About thirty years of age—good complexion—light curly hair—red whiskers—dark blue eyes—splendid teeth—thick lips——But here's your carriage come round to the door, my lady; and nothing could possibly be more convenient. Please not to waste time—as I think we can get him committed to-day."

The moment Dykes had begun his description, Lady Georgiana's eyes expressed the agonising nature of the suspense which she endured; but as he continued, and his portraiture became the more definite, an ashy paleness overspread her countenance.

This agitation on her part was not however perceived by either the Bow Street officer or Miss Mordaunt; for the former had a habit of fixing his eyes on the knob of his ash stick when he was engrossed in a professional topic; and the latter was drinking in with greedy ears the description of the supposed highwayman, whom she was quite astonished to hear represented as so very discrepant from her idea of what a midnight desperado must be.

The arrival of the carriage was, under the circumstances, quite a relief to Georgiana; and, without uttering another objection, she allowed Mr. Dykes to have his own way in the matter.

That experienced officer rang the bell as coolly as if the house was his own, and desired that the man-

servant and lady's-maid, who were in attendance on their mistress the preceding night, would prepare to accompany him to Bow Street.

Mason and Charlotte speedily obeyed this request, and the chariot, instead of taking the ladies up Bond Street, conveyed them, the two servants, and Mr. Dykes, to the police-office.

On their arrival, Mr. Dykes conducted his witnesses into a private room, and, after an absence of about five minutes, returned with the intelligence that the night charges were just disposed of, and that the prisoner was about to be placed in the dock.

A shudder passed through Georgiana's frame; but, with a desperate effort to compose herself, she followed Mr. Dykes into the court, Miss Mordaunt and the two servants remaining in the private room until they should be summoned individually to give their testimony.

As Georgiana was a lady of rank and fortune she was not treated as a humble witness would have been, but was accommodated with a chair, Mr. Dykes assuring her, in a confidential whisper, that she need not stand up to give her evidence.

The body of the court was crowded with a motley assembly of spectators, the news that a highwayman was about to be examined having spread like wild-fire throughout the neighbourhood.

Scarcely was Georgiana seated, when a sensation on the part of the crowd enabled her to judge that the accused was being brought in; and as Tom Rain leapt nimbly into the dock, she cast a rapid glance towards him—a glance in which terror was combined with indescribable disgust and aversion.

The accused affected not to notice her, but lounged in a very easy and familiar fashion over the front of the dock; surveying, first Sir Walter Ferguson, and then the clerk, with a complacency which would have almost induced an uninitiated stranger to imagine that *they* were the prisoners and *he* was the magistrate.

Mr. Dykes, being called upon by Sir Walter to explain the nature of the charge against the prisoner, declared that, "in consequence of information which he had received," (the invariable phraseology of old police-officers,) "he had arrested the accused on suspicion of having stopped Lady Hatfield's carriage on the preceding evening, and robbed her ladyship and her ladyship's friend of certain monies specified in an advertisement which he had caused to be inserted in that morning's paper." Mr. Dykes further stated that, having searched the prisoner, he had found upon him a considerable sum in gold; but none of the Bank-notes stolen.

Lady Hatfield was then sworn, and she corroborated the officer's statement relative to the robbery.

"Has your ladyship any reason to suppose that the prisoner in the dock is the person by whom your carriage was stopped?" inquired the magistrate.

"I feel well convinced, sir," was the reply, delivered, however, in a tremulous tone, "that the prisoner at the bar is *not* the man by whom I was robbed."

A smile of triumph curled the lips of Tom Rain; but Mr. Dykes surveyed Georgiana with stupid astonishment.

"Not the man, my lady!" he ejaculated, at length: "why, last night, your ladyship could give no description of what the robber was or what he was not!"

"Dykes, hold your tongue!" cried the magistrate: "her ladyship is upon her oath."

"Your worship," said Georgiana, in a firmer voice than before, "I was so bewildered last evening—so overcome with terror—"

"Naturally so, Lady Hatfield," observed the magistrate, with a very courteous smile, which seemed to say that he would rather believe the bare word of a member of the aristocracy—especially a lady—than the oaths of all his officers and runners put together. "In fact," continued Sir Walter blandly, "you were too much flurried, to use a common expression, to reply calmly and deliberately to any questions which Dykes may have put to you last evening."

"Such was indeed the case, your worship," answered Georgiana. "This morning, however, I have been enabled to collect my ideas, and to recall to mind the smallest details of the robbery. The highwayman had a black mask upon his face; but, by a sudden movement of his horse, as he stood by the carriage window, the mask slipped aside, and I caught a glimpse of his countenance by the moonlight."

"And that countenance?" said the magistrate.

"Was quite different from the prisoner's," replied Lady Hatfield firmly.

"Your ladyship did not make that statement when I gave you the description of the prisoner just now," said Dykes, evidently bewildered by the nature of Georgiana's testimony.

"Because you hurried me away, together with my friend and two of my servants, in a manner so precipitate that I had no time to utter a word," returned Lady Hatfield. "Moreover, as you had taken the prisoner into custody, I believed it to be necessary that his case should be brought beneath the cognizance of his worship."

Georgiana spoke in a tone apparently so decided and calm, that the officer knew not how to reply; although in his heart he suspected her sincerity.

The magistrate consulted the clerk; and, after the interchange of a few whispers, Sir Walter said, "I see no reason for detaining the prisoner: there is evidently some mistake on your part, Dykes."

"Your worship," exclaimed the officer, "I know not what to think. Can the prisoner give a good account of himself? He rides into London from Richmond at six o'clock this morning; puts his horse up at an inn in the Borough; goes to a coffee-house in another street to have his breakfast, and leaves a pair of pistols for the waiter to take care of for him; then walks over to a suspicious public not a hundred miles from this court; meets there a man that me and my partners have long had our eyes on; and, when he is searched, has a large sum in gold about his person."

"Do you hear what the officer says, prisoner?" inquired the magistrate.

"I do, your worship," answered Tom Rain, coolly; "and I can explain it all. I come up to London on business, which requires the sum of money found upon me. I put up my horse where I think fit; and I go elsewhere to get my breakfast, because I can have it cheaper than at the inn. I was armed with pistols because I had to travel a lonely road in the dark; and I left them at the coffee-house because I did not choose to drag them about with me all day long."

Mr. Dykes was about to reply, when two decently-

dressed men, who had entered the court a few minutes previously, stepped forward.

"Please, your worship," said the first, "I have known Mr. Rainford the last four years; and a more respectable man does not exist. He came up to London to buy a couple of horses of me; and he was to pay ready money. My name's Watkins your worship; and I've kept livery and bait stables in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, for the last seventeen years."

"And I, your worship," said the other person, in his turn, "can answer for Mr. Rainford. If you doubt my respectability, your worship, send one of your officers round to Compton Street, and see if the name of Bertinshaw isn't painted up in precious large letters over the best jeweller's shop—"

"And pawnbroker's," interrupted Mr. Dykes significantly.

"Well—and pawnbroker's, too," added Bertinshaw: "I'm not ashamed of the calling."

"Then you are both prepared to guarantee the prisoner's appearance at any future time?" said the magistrate.

"Certainly, your worship," was the joint reply.

"To answer any charge that may be brought against him?" continued Sir Walter.

The response was again in the affirmative on the part of Watkins and Bertinshaw.

The magistrate stated the amount of the recognizances which were to be entered into, and Tom Rain was desired to stand down from the dock.

This intimation he obeyed with the same air of calm indifference which had characterised him throughout the proceedings, and which had only been for a moment disturbed by the profound astonishment he had experienced when two men, whom he had never before seen nor even heard of in his life, stepped forward to give him so excellent a character and become his bail. But a moment's reflection convinced him that Old Death was the unseen friend who worked the machinery of this manœuvre.

While the clerk was filling up the bail-bond, Lady Georgiana retired from the office, her bosom a prey to feelings of a strangely conflicting nature,—joy at having passed through an ordeal which she had dreaded—grief at having stained her soul with the fell crime of deliberate perjury—and agony at the sad reminiscences which the presence of Rainford had recalled so forcibly to her mind.

Miss Mordaunt and the two servants were astonished to hear the unexpected turn which the proceedings had taken; but their attention was almost immediately absorbed in the condition of Lady Hatfield, who scarcely had time to communicate to them the result of her examination in the court, when a sudden faintness came over her. She had exhausted all her energies in the endeavour to maintain an air of calmness, and to reply in a tone of sincerity when in the presence of the magistrate; and now a reaction took place—her courage gave way—the weight of fearful reminiscences overpowered her—the glow of excitement which had mantled her cheeks changed to a death-like pallor—and she fainted in the arms of her friend.

Fortunately, Miss Mordaunt had a bottle of volatile salts with her; and by these means Georgiana was speedily recovered. She was then led to her carriage; but she did not appear to



breathes freely until the vehicle was some distance from the police-court.

CHAPTER IV.

ESTHER DE MEDINA.

LET us now return to the interior of the police-office.

The clerk was drawing up the bail-bond; the two securities were conversing in whispers with Tom Rain, whom they had affected to greet, when he descended from the dock, as an old acquaintance; and Mr. Dykes was leaning gloomily against the partition which separated the magistrate's desk from the body of the court,—when the entrance of two persons produced a new sensation amongst the crowd.

One was an officer of the court: the other was a lady, closely veiled, and enveloped in a cloak of rich material.

Her form was tall; and, even though her entire frame was now convulsed with intense anguish as she passed amidst the gaping throng to the

chair which Lady Hatfield had occupied two or three minutes previously, yet that excess of grief and terror did not bow her down, nor impair the graceful dignity of her gait.

The officer motioned her to seat herself, an intimation which she evidently accepted with gratitude.

"What is it, Bingham?" inquired the magistrate of the officer.

"Please, your worship," was the reply, "it's a serious charge; and the prosecutor will be here in a moment."

"Very well," said the magistrate: "I will take it directly."

"Who is she?" whispered Dykes, accosting his brother officer.

"Her name is Esther de Medina, she tells me," returned Bingham.

The question and answer were overheard by Tom Rainford, who was standing close by the officers; and the announcement of the lady's name produced a strange and almost electrical effect upon him.

The devil-me-care recklessness of his manner suddenly disappeared, and a sentiment of profound

commiseration and deep interest, in respect to Esther de Medina, seemed to occupy his mind.

He was about to question Mr. Bingham relative to the charge which he had against her, when the clerk called upon him and his securities to sign the bond. This ceremony was speedily performed; and Rain's money was returned to him by Mr. Dykes, who, however, looked at him in a manner which seemed to say—"I know I am not mistaken in you, although you have contrived to get off: but I'll have you another time."

Tom cared nothing for the sinister looks of the Bow Street officer; neither did he pay much attention to the gold which he now poured back into his pocket; for all his thoughts appeared to be absorbed in the presence of the veiled lady.

"Come along with us," whispered Bertinshaw, "and we'll celebrate your escape over a bottle of wine at my place."

"No—not now," replied Tom, hastily: "I mean to stay and hear this case: it interests me."

"Will you join us presently?" asked his new friend, who had just now pretended to be a very old one.

"Yes, yes," answered Tom: "in an hour or so."

Bertinshaw and Watkins then took their departure.

"Now, Bingham," cried the clerk; "what is it?"

At that moment a gentleman of handsome appearance and middle age entered the court.

"Here's the prosecutor who will explain the matter," said the officer.

The prisoner, suddenly remembering the respect due to the bench, raised her veil; and, at the same time, she glanced in an eager, inquiring manner towards the individual who now appeared against her.

But we must pause to describe her.

She was not more than eighteen years of age, and surpassingly lovely. Her complexion was a clear, transparent olive, beneath which the delicate tinge of carnation was not entirely chased away from her cheeks by the terror and grief that now oppressed her. Her face was of the aquiline cast—her forehead broad, high, and intelligent; her nose curved, but not too prominent in shape; her mouth small, with thin vermilion lips, revealing teeth of pearly whiteness; her chin sweetly rounded; and her eyes large, black, and brilliant. And never did more splendid orbs of light mirror the whole power of the soul, or flash brighter glances from beneath richly-fringed lids. Then her brows were so delicately pencilled, and so finely arched, that they gave an air of dignity to that lovely—that fascinating countenance. Her hair, too, was of the deepest black—a black so intense, that the raven's wing might not have compared with it. Silken and glossy, the luxuriant mass was parted above the forehead, and, flowing in two shining bands—one on each side of the face, for which they appeared to form an ebony frame,—was gathered behind the ears.

In stature she was tall, sylph-like, and graceful. Her shoulders had that fine slope which the Italian masters so much admired, and with which they were delighted to endow the heroines of their pictures. Her waist was admirably proportioned, and not rendered too thin by the unnatural art of tight-lacing. Her hand was of exceeding beauty; her feet and ankles were in perfect keeping with the exquisite symmetry of her form; and her gestures were full of dignity and grace.

She was a Jewess; and, if the most glorious beauty were honoured with a diadem, then should Esther de Medina have become Queen of the Scattered Race.

The moment she raised her veil, all who could catch a glimpse of her countenance were struck with astonishment at the dazzling loveliness thus revealed; and even the magistrate felt anxious to learn what misadventure could have placed so peerless a being within the grasp of justice. Her crime could scarcely be robbery; for she was well-dressed, and had the appearance of belonging to even a wealthy family. Besides, her face—her eyes seemed to denote a conscious purity of soul, in spite of the painful emotions which her present situation had excited within her bosom.

But the person who was most interested—most astonished by the sudden revelation of that exquisite countenance, was Tom Rain. It was not with lustful desire that he surveyed her; it was not with any unholy passion: on the contrary, it was with a sentiment of deep devotion and profound sympathy. He also manifested extreme curiosity to learn upon what possible charge Esther de Medina could have been brought thither.

On her part, she was evidently altogether unacquainted with the person of Tom Rain; for as she cast a rapid and timid glance around, her eyes lingered not upon him.

The middle-aged, handsome-looking man who had just entered the office, was now desired to state the grounds upon which Esther de Medina was in custody.

This witness deposed that his name was Edward Gordon, and that he was a diamond-merchant, residing in Arundel Street, Strand. On the 31st of October, at about five o'clock in the evening, a female called upon him and requested him to purchase of her a diamond ring, which she produced. He examined it by the light of the lamp burning in the apartment where he received her; and, finding that it was really a jewel of some value, he offered her a price which he considered fair. That sum was thirty guineas. She endeavoured to obtain more; but he did not consider himself justified in acceding to her wish. Finally, she accepted his proposal, received the amount, left the ring, and departed. He went out immediately after, carefully locking the door of the room. Having an engagement to dine with a friend, he returned home late, and did not enter that particular room until the following morning; when he discovered that a set of diamonds, which he remembered to have been lying in an open case upon the table at the time the female called on the preceding evening, was missing. He searched vainly in all parts of the room; and at length came to the fixed conclusion that the female in question had stolen the diamonds. He gave immediate information to Bingham, the officer, together with an accurate description of the suspected person; for she was upwards of twenty minutes with him on the evening of the 31st, and he had therefore seen enough of her to know her again.

"Moreover," added the prosecutor "two clear days only have elapsed since the interview which took place between us; and I appeal to your worship whether the countenance of the prisoner, when once seen, can be readily forgotten; for painful as it is to accuse so young and interesting a person of such a crime, my duty to society compels me to take this

step; and I have no hesitation in declaring that the prisoner is the female who sold me the ring."

A profound sigh escaped from the bosom of Esther; but she uttered not a word.

Bingham, the officer, then proved that he called about half an hour previously upon Mr. Gordon to inform him that he had vainly endeavoured to discover a clue to the supposed thief. Mr. Gordon was on the point of going out upon particular business, and the officer, in order not to detain him, walked a part of the way in his company, so that they might converse upon the subject of the robbery as they went along. They were passing through Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, when they met the prisoner at the bar. Mr. Gordon instantly recognised her, and the officer took her into custody. She manifested much indignation, and said that there must be some mistake; but when the nature of the charge was stated to her, she turned deadly pale, and burst into tears.

Rainford had listened to these statements with the deepest—the most intense interest; and his countenance underwent various changes, especially while Mr. Gordon was giving his evidence. At one moment Tom exhibited surprise—then indignation,—and, lastly, the most unfeigned sorrow.

But suddenly an idea seemed to strike him: for a minute did he reflect profoundly; and then joy animated his features.

Hastily quitting the court, he hurried to the coffee-house opposite, called for writing materials, and penned the following letter:—

"Nov. 3, 1826.

"MY LORD,—Esther de Medina is at Bow Street, accused of a crime which is alleged to have been committed at about five o'clock in the evening of the 31st of October. It is for you to prove her innocence. Delay not, then, an instant.

"AN UNKNOWN FRIEND TO ESTHER."

Throwing a shilling upon the table, Tom Rain hurried away, took a hackney-coach at the nearest station, and desired to be driven to the mansion of Lord Ellingham, Pall-mall, West.

A half-guinea which he slipped into the coachman's hand as he entered the vehicle, produced the desired effect; for the horses were urged into a pace the rapidity of which seemed to astonish themselves as a proof of what they could do if they chose; and, in a very short time, Rainford leapt out at the door of his lordship's abode.

The nobleman was fortunately at home; and Tom Rain delivered the letter to the servant who answered his summons.

Then, having desired the coachman to wait, as he might have "a fare" back to Bow Street, Rainford hurried away at his utmost speed, retracing his steps to the police-office.

In the meantime, the clerk had taken down the depositions of Mr. Edward Gordon and Bingham; while the most extraordinary sensation prevailed in the court. The youth—the loveliness—the modest, yet dignified appearance of Esther de Medina enlisted all sympathies in her favour; and many a rude heart then present felt a pang at the idea of believing her to be guilty.

She had stood up when the prosecutor was called against her; but when he reached that point in his evidence which mentioned the loss of his diamonds, she clasped her hands convulsively together, and, trembling with agitation, sank into the chair from which she had risen.

When the depositions were taken down, the magistrate said, "Prisoner, you have heard the very serious charge made against you: have you any thing to say in your defence?"

Then she spoke for the first time since she had entered the court; and though her words were delivered with impassioned emphasis, the melodious tones of her voice sounded like a silver bell upon the ears of all present.

"Sir, I am innocent—I am innocent!" she exclaimed. "Oh! God knows that I am innocent!"

The glance she darted from beneath her darkly fringed lids spoke even more eloquently than her words; and every feature of her fine countenance seemed to bear testimony to the truth of her declaration.

"Would you not do well to send for your friends?" asked the magistrate, in a kind tone.

These words seemed to touch her most acutely: they summed up as it were all the painful features of her most distressing position.

"Oh! my father—my dear, dear father!" she exclaimed, her countenance expressing so much bitter—bitter anguish, that there was scarcely an unmoistened eye in the court.

"Your worship, I do not wish to prosecute this case—I am sorry I have gone so far," said the diamond-merchant, wiping away the tears from his cheeks—for he was really a good-natured man.

"It is not in my power to stay the proceedings," replied Sir Walter Ferguson. "The evidence is unfortunately strong against the prisoner. She would do well to send for her friends. Let the case stand over for half an hour."

Esther was accordingly conducted into the magistrate's private room, where she was visited by the female-searcher, who endeavoured to persuade her, with as much gentleness as she could command, to mention the residence of her parents.

"Alas! my mother has long been dead," was the mournful reply; "and my poor father—oh! it would break his heart were he to know—"

She checked herself, and fell into a profound reverie—despair expressed in her countenance. During the remainder of the half hour which intervened ere she was led back to the office, she replied only in vague and unsatisfactory, but not self-inculpating, monosyllables to the questions addressed to her.

At length the female-searcher gave her an indirect intimation, that her punishment on trial would be more lenient if she admitted her guilt and expressed her contrition.

"What!" she exclaimed, with a recovering sob; "do you really deem me culpable of this most heinous charge? My God! have the Christians no mercy—no compassion? Oh! I should not speak thus to you! But I know that our race is looked upon with suspicion: we are prejudged, because we are Jews! And yet," she added, in a different and prouder tone, "there are as noble sentiments—as generous feelings—as estimable qualities amongst the members of the scattered tribe, as in the hearts of those Christians who have persecuted our nation for centuries and centuries!"

The woman, to whom these words were addressed, was astonished at the enthusiastic manner in which the beautiful Jewess spoke; for there was something at that moment sublimely interesting—eloquently commanding about Esther de Medina, as

the rich colour glowed more deeply upon her cheeks, the blue veins dilated on her proud forehead, and the whole power of her soul seemed thrown into her magnificent eyes.

It was at this moment that the usher of the court entered to conduct the Jewess back into the office.

Once more she stood in the presence of the magistrate,—now no longer subdued and crushed with terror; but nerved, as it were by conscious innocence, to meet the accusation brought against her.

Tom Rain had returned to the court; and, by mingling with the crowd of spectators, anxiously watched the countenance of Esther de Medina.

"Prisoner," said the magistrate, "have you anything now to offer in your defence? Or have you sent to communicate with your friends relative to the position in which you are placed?"

"Sir," answered Esther, her soft and musical tones falling like a delicious harmony upon the ears, "I have but one word to utter in my defence; and if I did not speak it when I first stood before you, it was simply because this terrible accusation, bursting so abruptly upon the head of an innocent person, stupefied me—deprived me of the power of collecting my ideas. Neither was it until within a moment of my return into the court that the fact which I am about to state flashed to my memory. Sir—I was not in London from two o'clock in the afternoon until half-past ten o'clock at night, on the 31st of October."

A gentle—a very gentle smile played upon her vermillion lips as she uttered these words.

"And it was during the interval which you name that the prosecutor was visited by the female whom he believes to have robbed him of his diamonds?" observed the magistrate.

"I deny having visited the prosecutor at all," answered Esther, in a firm but respectful tone. "I never sold him a ring—I never sold an article of jewellery to a living being. Placed by the honest industry of my father above want," she continued proudly, "I labour not under the necessity of parting with my jewellery to obtain money."

At this moment, a fine, tall, handsome young man, of about six and twenty years of age, entered the court. He was dressed in an elegant but unassuming manner: his bearing was lofty, without being proud; and his fine blue eyes indicated a frank and generous disposition.

Slightly inclining in acknowledgment of the respect with which the crowd made way for him to pass, he advanced towards the magistrate, who instantly recognised him as an acquaintance.

At the same moment, Esther started with surprise, and murmured the name of Lord Ellingham.

To the astonishment of all present—Tom Rain, perhaps, excepted,—the nobleman shook Esther kindly by the hand, saying, "In the name of heaven, Miss de Medina, what unfortunate—or rather ridiculous mistake has brought you hither?"

Sir Walter Ferguson immediately directed the clerk to read over the depositions.

"What!" ejaculated Lord Ellingham, who had scarcely been able to restrain his indignation during the recital of the previous proceedings: "the daughter of a respectable and wealthy gentleman to be placed in such a position as this! But in a moment I will make her innocence apparent. At the very time when this robbery was alleged to have

taken place—at the hour when the female, for whom this young lady has evidently been mistaken called upon the prosecutor—Miss de Medina was not within six miles of Arundel Street."

These words produced in the court a sensation which was the more lively because they seemed to corroborate the prisoner's own defence—a defence which Lord Ellingham had not heard.

Mr. Gordon, the prosecutor, looked astounded—and yet not altogether grieved at the prospect of the prisoner's discharge.

"Mr. de Medina," continued Lord Ellingham, "has only recently arrived in London, having retired from an extensive commercial business which he long carried on at Liverpool. He has become my tenant for a house and small estate situated at a distance of about seven miles from the metropolis; and on the 31st of October I accompanied him and his daughter—the lady now present—on a visit to the property thus leased. We left London in my own carriage at about two o'clock on the day named; and it was between ten and eleven at night when we returned. During that interval of several hours Miss de Medina never quitted her father and myself."

A murmur of satisfaction arose on the part of the spectators; but it was almost immediately interrupted by the entrance of an elderly and venerable-looking man, whose countenance—of that cast which ever characterises the sons of the scattered tribe—had once been strikingly handsome. Though not deficient in an expression of generosity, it nevertheless exhibited great firmness of disposition; and his keen black eyes denoted a resolute, unbending, and determined soul. He was upwards of fifty-five years of age, and was plainly, though neatly, dressed.

Advancing into the body of the court, he cast a rapid glance around.

"My father!" exclaimed Esther; and springing forward, she threw herself into her parent's arms.

He held her tenderly for a few moments: then, gently disengaging himself from her embrace, he murmured in her ear, "Oh! Esther—Esther, I can understand it all! You have brought this upon yourself!"

But these words were heard only by Lord Ellingham, who had advanced to shake hands with the Jew.

That reproach appeared for the moment to be singular and altogether misplaced, as it was impossible that Esther could have perpetrated the crime imputed to her: but the nobleman had not leisure to reflect upon it, for Mr. de Medina now perceived him and accepted the outstretched hand.

"I was accidentally passing by the court," said the Jew; "and hearing my own name mentioned by some loungers outside, paused to listen. Their conversation induced me to make inquiries; and I learnt all the particulars of this charge."

"And some unknown friend of Miss de Medina sent me a hasty note conveying the unpleasant intelligence," answered Lord Ellingham. "But I believe that I have fully convinced his worship of your daughter's innocence."

These last words were uttered in a louder tone than the former part of the observation, and were evidently addressed to the magistrate.

"For my part," said Mr. Gordon, "I am perfectly satisfied that there is a grievous misunder-

standing in this matter. Miss de Medina is evidently unconnected with it; and yet," he added, as his eyes dwelt upon her countenance, "never was resemblance so striking! However—I am well pleased to think that Miss de Medina is *not* the person by whom I was plundered; and I most sincerely implore her pardon for the inconvenience—nay, the ignominy to which she has been subjected."

Esther turned an appealing glance towards her father, as if to remind him of some duty which he ought to perform, or to convey some silent prayer which he could well understand: but he affected not to notice that rapid but profoundly significant glance.

The magistrate then declared that the young lady was discharged, without the slightest stain upon her character.

Hastily drawing down her thick black veil, Esther de Medina bowed deferentially to the bench; and passed out of the office, leaning on her father's arm, and accompanied by the Earl of Ellingham.

Tom Rain followed her with his eyes until the door closed behind her.

For a few moments he remained wrapped up in a deep reverie: then, heaving a profound sigh, he also took his departure.

CHAPTER V.

THE APPEAL OF LOVE.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening of the day on which so many strange incidents occurred at Bow Street, that Lady Hatfield was reclining in a melancholy mood upon the sofa in the drawing-room of her splendid mansion.

She was dressed in black satin, which set off the beauty of her complexion to the greatest advantage.

One of her fair hands drooped over the back of the sofa: the other listlessly held a book, to the perusal of which she had vainly endeavoured to settle herself.

There was a mysterious air of mournfulness about her that contrasted strangely with the elegance of the apartment, the cheerful blaze of the fire, the brilliant lustre of the lamps, and the general appearance of wealth and luxury by which she was surrounded.

That sorrowful expression, too, was the more unaccountable, inasmuch as the social position of Georgiana Hatfield seemed to be enviable in the extreme. Beautiful in person, possessing rank and wealth, and free to follow her own inclinations, she might have shone the star of fashion—the centre of that human galaxy whose sphere is the West End of London.

Oh! bright—gloriously bright are the planets which move in that heaven of their own:—and yet how useless is their brilliancy! The planets of God's own sky are made to bestow their light upon the orbs which without them would revolve in darkness; but the planets of the sphere of aristocracy and fashion throw not a single ray upon the millions of inferior stars which are compelled to circle around them!

To Lady Hatfield the pleasures and dissipation of the West End were unwelcome; and she seldom

entered into society, save when a refusal would prove an offence. Up to the age of seventeen or eighteen she had been remarkable for a happy, joyous, and gay disposition: but a sudden change came over her at that period of her life; and since then her habits had grown retired—her disposition mournful.

But let us return to her, as she lay reclining on the sofa in the drawing-room.

The robbery of the preceding night and the events of the morning had evidently produced a powerful impression upon her mind. At times an expression of acute anguish distorted her fair countenance for a moment; and once or twice she compressed her lips forcibly, as if to restrain a burst of mental agony.

The time-piece upon the mantel had just proclaimed the hour of eight, when a domestic entered the room and announced the Earl of Ellingham.

Georgiana started up—assumed a placid expression of countenance—and advanced to receive the young nobleman, who, as he took her hand, respectfully pressed it to his lips.

"Your ladyship will, I hope, pardon me for intruding at this hour," he said, as he conducted her back to the sofa, and then took a chair at a short distance; "but I was not aware of your return to town until an hour ago, when I perused in the evening paper an account of the outrage of last night and the investigation at Bow Street this morning. How annoying it must have been to you, my dear Lady Hatfield, to have gone through the ordeal of a visit to a police-court!"

"There is something gloomy and dispiriting in the aspect of these tribunals which the crimes of the human race have rendered necessary," observed Georgiana. "The countenances of those persons whom I beheld at the police-office this morning, had all a certain sinister expression which I cannot define, but which seemed to proclaim that they never contemplated aught save the dark side of society."

"The same idea struck me this day," said Lord Ellingham: "for I also paid a visit to Bow Street—and scarcely an hour, I should conceive, after you must have left the office. But enough of this subject: the words *Bow Street—Police—and Tribunal* grate painfully upon the ear even of the innocent—that is, if they possess hearts capable of sorrowing for the woes and crimes of their fellow-creatures. Lady Hatfield," continued the Earl, drawing his chair a little closer, "it was to converse upon another topic—yes, another and a more tender topic—that I have hastened to your presence this evening."

Georgiana was about to reply;—but the words died upon her quivering lips—and an oppressive feeling kept her silent.

"Yes, my dear Lady Hatfield," continued the Earl, drawing his chair still more nigh,—"I can no longer exist in this state of suspense. During the whole of last winter I was often in your society. You were kind enough to permit my visits—and it was impossible to be much with you, and not learn to love you. You departed suddenly for the country last July: but I dared not follow—for you had not even informed me of your intended retirement from London at so early a period. Pardon me if I say I felt hurt,—yes, *hurt*, Lady Hatfield,—because I loved you! And yet never—during that interval

of four months—has your image been absent from my mind: and now I am again attracted towards you by a spell stronger than my powers of resistance. Oh! you must long ago have read my heart, Georgiana:—say, then—*can* you, *do* you love me in return?"

There was something so sincere—so earnest—and yet so manly in the fluent language of the Earl of Ellingham,—his fine countenance was lighted up with so animated an expression of hope and love,—and his eyes bore such complete testimony to the candour of his speech,—that Georgiana must have been ungenerous indeed had she heard that appeal with coldness.

Nor was it so; and the Earl read in the depths of her melting blue orbs a sentiment reciprocal with his own.

"My lord—Arthur," she murmured, "you ask me if I *can* love—if I *do* love you:—and, oh! you know not the pang which that question excites in my heart! Yes," she added hastily, seeing that the Earl was astonished at her words, "I *do* love you, Arthur—for you are all that is good, generous, and handsome! But—my God!—how can I force my lips to utter the sad avowal——"

"Speak, Georgiana—speak, I conjure you!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham: "you alarm me! Oh! keep me not in suspense! You say that you love me——"

"I never loved until I knew you—I shall never love another," answered Georgiana, fixing her deep, silently expressive, and intellectual eyes upon the countenance of the Earl.

"A thousand thanks for that declaration, my heart's sole joy!" he cried in an impassioned tone; and, falling on his knees by the side of the sofa, he threw his arms around her—he clasped her to his breast—his lips pressed hers for the first time.

But that joy lasted only for a moment.

With rebounding heart—and with almost a scream of anguish—Georgiana drew herself back, and abruptly repulsed her ardent lover: then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into a flood of tears.

"My God! what signifies this strange conduct?" ejaculated the Earl, as, with wounded pride, he retreated a few paces from the weeping lady.

"Forgive me—forgive me, Arthur!" she wildly cried, turning her streaming eyes towards him in a beseeching manner. "I am unhappy—very unhappy—and you should pity me!"

"Pity *you*!" exclaimed the Earl, again approaching the sofa, and taking her hand, which she did not attempt to withdraw: "how can *you* be an object of pity? Beautiful—beloved by one whose life shall be devoted to ensure the felicity of yours——"

"Oh! your generous affection, Arthur, gives me more pain than all the rest!" cried Georgiana, in a rapid—half-hysterical tone. "As a weak woman, I have dared to love you—as an imprudent one, I have confessed that love;—but now," she added, in a slower and firmer tone, while her vermilion lips quivered with a bitter smile,—“now, as a strong woman—as a woman restored to a sense of duty—do I make the avowal—and my heart is ready to break as I thus speak——"

"Good heavens! relieve me from this cruel—this agonising suspense!" passionately exclaimed the Earl.

"I will—I will," returned Lady Hatfield. "Arthur—dearly, fondly, devotedly as I love you,—proud as I should be to call you my husband,—happy, happy as I should feel to link my fate with yours,—alas! it cannot be!—never—never!" she added with a frantic vehemence that caused every chord to thrill in the heart of her admirer.

"Georgiana, is this possible?" he asked, in a faint tone, while a deadly pallor overspread his countenance.

"Would that it were *not*!" she murmured, clasping her hands together in visible anguish of soul.

"And yet it is incomprehensible!" cried the Earl, starting back, and even manifesting somewhat of impatience. "You are not a foolish girl who takes delight in trifling with the sincere attachment of an honest man who adores her:—you are not a heartless coquette, looking upon her admirer as a slave whom she is justified to torture. No—no: you yourself possess a generous soul—you have no sympathy with the frivolous portion of your sex—you are as strong-minded, as sincere as you are beautiful. Tell me, then, Georgiana—what signifies this strange contradiction? You love me—you would be happy and proud to become mine;—and yet—my God!—and yet you the next moment annihilate every hope in my breast!"

"Alas! how unpardonable must my conduct seem—how inexplicable my behaviour!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield, in a tone of despair. "I am not indeed a heartless coquette—nor a weak frivolous girl:—in the sincerity of my heart do I speak, Arthur;—and if you be generous you will forgive me—but I never can be thine!"

"Then you love another!" cried the Earl, impatiently.

"Have I not solemnly assured you that I never loved till I knew you—and shall never, never love again!" she added, with a convulsive sob, as if her heart were breaking.

"But perhaps you were betrothed to another in your youth:—peradventure that *other* has some sacred pledge—some irrevocable bond——"

"No—no: I am my own mistress—none can control me!" interrupted Georgiana, her nervous state of excitement growing each moment more painful.

"And your uncle—your friends—your advisers?" said the Earl,—“it is possible that *they* have become acquainted with my attachment towards you—that *they* have some motive to counsel you against my suit?"

"On the contrary—But, my God! do not question me thus!" almost shrieked the unhappy lady. "I shall go mad—I shall go mad!"

"Oh! there is some dreadful mystery in all this!" cried the Earl; "and I too shall go mad if it be not explained! Merciful heavens! a terrible suspicion flashes across my mind. And yet—no—no, it cannot be,—for you declare that you never loved another! Still—still, what motive, save *that*, can render you thus resolute not to become mine? Georgiana," he said, sinking his voice to a low tone, and speaking with a solemn seriousness which had something even awful in its effect,—“Georgiana, I conjure you to answer me,—*no*, who am your devoted lover and your sincerest friend,—as you would reply to your God! Say—if in your giddy and inexperienced girlhood—ignorant through extreme in-

nocence of the snare spread for you—and in a moment of weakness—you——”

“Just heavens! that you should suppose me criminal—guilty!” shrieked Georgiana, covering her face with her hands.

“Pardon—pardon!” cried the Earl, again falling on his knees at the feet of her whom he adored; and, forcibly possessing himself of one of her hands, he conveyed it to his lips. “Pardon me for the outrageous idea that I dared to express—forgive the insulting suspicion which for a moment occupied my mind! Alas! alas! that I should have provoked the look of indignation which you ere now cast upon me, when I withdrew your hand from before your eyes! But, ah—now you smile—and I am forgiven!”

Georgiana *did* smile—but in a manner so plaintively melancholy, that, although it implied forgiveness for the injurious suspicion, it still conveyed no hope!

There was a long and mournful pause.

The Earl of Ellingham burned to penetrate the deep mystery in which the conduct of Lady Hatfield was shrouded; and yet he knew not what other hypothesis to suggest.

He had no rival in her affections—her friends offered no objection to his suit—she was under no pledge to bestow her hand upon any particular individual—and the evanescent suspicion that she might have once been frail and was too honourable to bring a polluted person to the marriage-bed, had been banished beyond the possibility of return:—what, then, could influence her conduct?

He knew not how to elicit the truth; and yet his happiness was too deeply interested to permit him to depart in uncertainty and suspense.

“Georgiana,” he said, at length, and speaking in a tone which showed how profoundly his feelings were excited,—“I appeal to your sense of justice whether you have acted candidly and generously in respect to me? Throughout the whole of last winter you permitted my visits—I will not say encouraged them, because you have too much delicacy to have done that. But you were never denied to me; and you gave me not to understand that my calls were unwelcome, when they began to exceed the usual limits of mere friendly visits. At length my attentions became marked towards you,—and you must have read my feelings in my manner—my language—and my attentions. Alas! why did you permit me to encourage the blossoming of hopes which are now so cruelly blighted by the unaccountable decision that you have uttered to-day?”

“Oh! do not reproach me, Arthur!” exclaimed Georgiana; “and yet I know that I have acted imprudently. But it was so sweet to be beloved by you, that I had not courage to destroy the charming vision! At length I took a decided step—or at least what seemed to me to be so: I departed suddenly to my uncle’s country-seat, without previously intimating my resolution to you. And remember—no avowal of affection on your part had then met my ears; and it was impossible that I could have acquainted you with my proposed departure, even if I had wished so to do—because I did not see you on the day when I determined to quit London: and had I *written* to you then, would you not have thought that my note conveyed a hint for you to follow me?”

“Fool—idiot that I was not to have declared my

passion months and months ago!” ejaculated the Earl. “But say, Georgiana—had I solicited your hand last summer, ere you left London, would those reasons which influence you now——”

“Yes—they were in existence then,” was the hasty reply.

“And am I to remain in ignorance of the motives which compel you to refuse my suit?” asked Lord Ellingham bitterly. “Is there no chance of their influence ceasing? Oh! give me but a glimpse of hope, and so powerful is my attachment—so devoted my love——”

“Merciful heavens!” exclaimed Georgiana wildly,—“am I then to lose such a man as this?”

And again she clasped her hands convulsively together.

“Oh! you love me—you *do* love me, my angel,” cried the Earl; “and yet you refuse me! What stern fate—what terrible destiny can possibly separate us? This mystery is appalling!”

“And a mystery it must remain,” said Georgiana, suddenly assuming that quiet and passive manner which indicated despair.

“Then farewell, Lady Hatfield,” exclaimed the Earl; “and be not surprised if I must attribute the disappointment—the anguish—the deep humiliation which I now experience, to some inexplicable caprice of the female mind. But, madam,” he added, drawing himself up haughtily, and speaking in a tone of offended pride, “the Earl of Ellingham, whose wealth and rank may enable him to vie with the mightiest peers of England, will not be made the sport of the whims and wavering fancies of even the beautiful Lady Hatfield.”

Thus speaking, the nobleman bowed coldly, and advanced towards the door.

“Oh! this is cruel—this is cruel!” cried Georgiana, throwing herself hysterically back upon the sofa.

“No, madam—it is you who are cruel to reject the honourable suit of one like me without deigning to vouchsafe an explanation,” said the Earl, persisting in his severity of tone and manner against the promptings of his generous nature, but with the hope of eliciting a satisfactory reply.

“Then go, my lord—depart—leave me!” cried Georgiana; “for I never can be yours!”

The Earl lingered for a moment: convulsive sobs broke from the lips of the unhappy Lady Hatfield—but not a word to invite him to remain!

His pride would not permit him to offer farther entreaty;—and, suffering cruelly at heart, he rushed from the room.

In less than a minute Georgiana heard the street door close; and then, burying her face in the cushion of the sofa, she gave way unrestrainedly to all the violence of her grief.

CHAPTER VI.

DR. LASCELLES.

THE interview between Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham was as long as it was painful: and ten o’clock struck by the thousand churches of London, as the nobleman quitted the mansion.

There was such a fierce struggle in his breast between wounded pride and fervent affection, that

his sorrow for the blighted hope of the latter was rendered less acute by being united with the indignation inspired by the former.

In spite of his generous nature, he could not help thinking that he had been trifled with to some extent; for it naturally seemed preposterous that Georgiana should refuse him without a candid explanation of the motives, and when every earthly circumstance appeared favourable to their union.

Then, again, he pondered upon the wildness of her grief—the delirious anguish which she had shown at several stages of their interview—her solemn avowal of love for him alone—and her voluntary assurance that she should be happy and proud to call him her husband. He moreover reflected upon the steadiness of her character—her aversion to the frivolities of the fashionable world—her apparent candour of disposition—and her total want of any thing approaching to coquetry;—and he endeavoured to persuade himself that he had acted harshly by leaving her in anger.

"Yet what alternative had I?" he asked himself; "and would not any other man have in the same way cut short an interview of so mysterious and unsatisfactory—so perplexing and humiliating a nature?"

Alas! the Earl of Ellingham found himself the very next minute dwelling with an aching and compassionate heart upon the agonised state in which he had left the being whom he so tenderly loved:—he thought of her fascinating beauty—her bewitching manners—her well-cultivated mind—her amiable disposition;—and then he said within himself, "Oh! if I have indeed lost *her*, I have lost an angel!"

He had reached the immediate vicinity of Hatchett's Hotel, when he turned back with the resolution of seeking another interview with Georgiana.

But scarcely had he retraced ten steps of the way, ere he stopped short, and asked himself what advantage could be gained by such a proceeding?

"The decision is given," he reasoned: "she can never *never* be mine! Wherefore should I renew *her* grief and *my* humiliation—evoke fresh tears from *her* eyes, and add sharpness to the sting of *my* disappointment? No: it may not be! Some terrible mystery shrouds her conduct from my penetration;—but shall I, who am defeated in love, give way to a base sentiment of curiosity? It would be unmanly—ignoble—cowardly to attempt to extort her secret from *her*,—for a profound secret she doubtless cherishes—a secret which has this evening influenced her conduct! And perhaps," he thought, following the natural channel of his meditations, "that secret is of a nature which a modest woman could not reveal to one of the opposite sex?"

This idea, suddenly flashing across his brain, suggested a proceeding which, after a few minutes of profound reflection, he determined to adopt.

Passing rapidly up Dover Street, Lord Ellingham entered Grafton Street, where he knocked at a door on which was a brass-plate engraved with the name of DR. LASCELLES.

The physician was at home; and the nobleman was immediately ushered into a parlour, where he was shortly joined by the individual whom he sought.

Dr. Lascelles was a short, thin, sallow-faced man

of about fifty. He had, small, restless, sparkling eyes, a prim mouth, and an intelligent though by no means prepossessing countenance. He was devoted to the art which he practised, and was reputed the most scientific man of the whole faculty. His anatomical researches had been prosecuted with an energy and a perseverance which afforded occupation to half the resurrection-men in London, and more than once to the doctor's own personal danger in respect to the law. It was whispered in well-informed circles that he never hesitated to encounter any peril in order to possess himself of the corpse of a person who died of an unusual malady. His devotion to anatomy had materially blunted his feelings and deadened the kinder sympathies of his nature; but his immense talents, added to a reputation acquired by several wonderful cures, rendered him the most fashionable physician of the day.

Such was the medical gentleman whom Lord Ellingham called to consult.

"Excuse this late visit, doctor," said the Earl; "but I knew that I might take the liberty of intruding upon you."

"The words *early* and *late* are not in my vocabulary, so far as they regard myself," was the reply. "My hours are at the disposal of my patrons, amongst whom I have the honour to include your lordship."

"Then, without farther apology, I shall proceed to state the object of my visit," said the nobleman.

"Give me your hand—you look dejected—you are very pale—your pulse—"

"It is not concerning myself altogether that I have to speak," interrupted the Earl, withdrawing the hand which the doctor had seized: "I wish to consult you upon a subject intimately affecting my happiness."

The physician looked surprised, and drew his chair closer to that in which the Earl was seated.

"To tell you the truth," continued Arthur, "I am deeply enamoured of a lady whose social position, beauty, fortune, and intellect render her in every way worthy to become my wife."

"Well—why don't you propose to her?" demanded the physician drily.

"I have—and am rejected," was the answer, accompanied by a profound sigh.

"The devil!" said the physician. "But what can I do for you in the matter? Surely your lordship does not believe in philtres and love-draughts?"

"Ridiculous!" cried the Earl impatiently. "If you will grant me a few moments, I will explain myself."

Dr. Lascelles folded his arms, threw himself back in the chair, and prepared to listen to his young friend's narrative.

"The lady to whom I am attached," continued the Earl, "is, as I ere now informed you, in every way worthy of an alliance with me; and she is moreover deeply attached to me. She has never loved another, and declares that she never can. No apparent circumstances interfere with our union; and she has done me the honour to assure me that she should be alike proud and happy to own me as her husband. She is entirely her own mistress; and, even if she were not, her friends would present no barrier to our marriage. Yet she refuses me—and for some mysterious cause which she will not explain. I have just left her,—left her in a stato



of anguish such as I never before witnessed—such as I hope never to behold again ! ”

“ Perhaps she has been guilty of some weakness which she is afraid you would discover ? ” suggested Dr. Lascelles.

“ Oh ! no—no,” exclaimed Arthur, enthusiastically : “ in an unguarded moment—carried away by a hasty suspicion of the kind—I hinted at that possibility,—and I soon repented of my rashness ! The lady’s countenance flushed with a glow of honest indignation ; and, instantly veiling her blushes with her hand, she burst into tears. I could pledge my existence, doctor, that she is purity itself.”

“ But wherefore do you consult me in the matter ? ” asked Lascelles.

“ You must admit, doctor,” answered Ellingham, “ that my position is a singular one in reference to the lady of whom I speak. What am I to conjecture ? Suspense is terrible ; and yet, not for worlds would I again attempt to extort her secret from her.”

“ The motive may be a physical one,” said the doctor.

“ That was the idea which ere now struck me, and which has brought me hither to consult you ! ” exclaimed the Earl.

“ She may be the prey to some insidious disease which impairs not her exterior aspect at present,” continued Doctor Lascelles ; “ say, for instance, a cancer in the breast. Or again, her motive may be a moral one ; inasmuch as she may be aware, from some secret warnings, that she is in danger of suffering an aberration of reason.”

“ And if the lady were a patient of your own, doctor,” asked the Earl, “ should you be enabled to judge whether she were menaced by that dreadful mental malady to which you have alluded ? ”

“ Decidedly so,” replied the physician.

The Earl rose from his seat, and walked two or three times up and down the apartment.

Dr. Lascelles followed him with his eyes ; and as he surveyed the strong, well-knit, but slender and graceful form of the young nobleman, the votary of science could not help thinking what a splendid skeleton he would make.

At length the Earl stopped abruptly opposite the doctor, and said in an impressive tone, “ You will never reveal the particulars of this interview ? ”

“ It is scarcely probable,” returned Lascelles, with a smile.

“ But you promise me—you pledge your word

never to breathe a syllable which may betray the motive of my present visit, or the topic of our conversation?" persisted the Earl.

"Never," exclaimed the physician.

"Then listen," said the Earl, sinking his voice almost to a whisper;—"the lady of whom I have spoken is—"

"Lady Hatfield," observed Lascelles.

"What! you have guessed—"

"Simply because every one said last winter that you were dying for her," interrupted the doctor coolly; "and therefore I presume you have availed yourself of her ladyship's return to town, to place your coronet at her feet."

"Yes—I do allude to Georgiana, whose professional attendant you are," cried the Earl. "And believe me, when I solemnly declare that no sentiment of impertinent curiosity—"

"Never mind the motives," said the doctor: "let us keep to the facts. I have known Lady Hatfield for upwards of five years; and I can positively assure your lordship that there is not the slightest cause, physical or moral, with which I am acquainted, that can influence her conduct towards you."

"Then, what can this mystery be?" exclaimed Arthur, more perplexed than ever. "My God! must I again fall back upon the hypothesis of a woman's idle caprice—the theory of her unaccountable whims? Is she the victim of an idiosyncrasy which she cannot control? and must I be made its sport?"

"Throughout the sphere of my extensive practice," observed Dr. Lascelles, "I know not a woman less likely to be swayed by idle caprice or unaccountable whims than Lady Hatfield. Her mind is strong—her intellect bright and uncharacterised by the slightest eccentricity. I have, however, frequently observed that her ladyship is the prey to a secret melancholy—that she has her dark moments, as one may denominate them; but at those times the vigour of her soul is not subdued to a degree that would produce so strange a result as a decision affecting her own happiness. You say she loves you—"

"I have not a doubt of the sincerity of her attachment!" cried the Earl emphatically.

"And yet she will not marry you?" said the doctor. "I cannot comprehend it."

"Nor I," observed Arthur, with exceeding bitterness of tone. "My happiness is at stake. What can I do? Had she explained the motive of her refusal, and were that motive a strong one,—did it reveal some cause which would render our union infelicitous,—I might have born up against this cruel—cruel disappointment. My love for her would then have been converted, by admiration of her generous candour, into a permanent friendship; and we might henceforth have met as brother and sister. But how can I ever visit her again? how can I meet her? Beautiful and amiable as she is, I adore her;—and yet I dare not in future trust myself in her presence! No:—I must crush this love in my heart—stifle it—subdue it altogether! Oh! fool that I am to talk thus;—as if it were practicable to forget her—as if it were possible to cease to worship her! Ere now, as I walked through the streets, I endeavoured to blunt the keenness of my affection by placing it in contact with the amount of wrong which I deemed myself to have experienced at her hands. But, unjustly perhaps as she has treated me—humiliated as I felt and still feel myself to be—chagrined—disappointed—rejected without explanation,—oh! all these injuries are absorbed in the immensity of the love which I bear her!"

And in a state of extraordinary excitement, Arthur paced the room with agitated steps.

The doctor sat musing upon his chair. He had ever been too much devoted to scientific pursuits to afford leisure for the delights of love; and though he was married, he had entered the connubial state only through motives of self-interest. Well aware that ladies prefer a medical attendant whose propriety of conduct is—or at least appears to be—guaranteed by marriage, he had one day cast his mental eyes around the circle of his acquaintance; and his glances were at length fixed upon a wealthy widow who was one of his patients. Jumping into his cab, he called upon her, and, in order not to waste time, proposed while he felt her pulse: she simpered an assent—and, as she could not name the day, he did it for her while he wrote out a prescription. Then he pocketed her guinea all the same—not through meanness, but from the regularity of professional habit; and had she offered him a fee as an acknowledgment for his loss of time on the morning when they issued from the church, he would also have taken it. This union was sterile; but the doctor found that he had obtained an excellent wife, who kept his house in good order—did the honours of his table to admiration—and never interrupted him when he was engaged in his study.

We have only introduced this little episode in the life of Dr. Lascelles, just to convince our readers that he was not at all the man to comprehend the vehemence of Lord Ellingham's love. Thus, while the nobleman was pacing the apartment in the manner described above, and declaiming in reference to his passion, the physician was meditating profoundly upon the conduct of Lady Hatfield, in refusing so excellent a match. His mind, habituated to connect every thing as much as possible with the special sphere of science wherein he moved, soon lost itself in a field of conjecture, as to whether there might not be some physical cause, carefully concealed even from himself, which would elucidate the mystery. The result of his meditations was not at all satisfactory to himself; but he resolved that he would not allow the matter to remain just where it was.

This determination he did not, however, communicate to Lord Ellingham, who took his leave more bewildered than ever, as to the motive which could have possibly induced Lady Hatfield to assure him of her love, and yet refuse him her hand.

CHAPTER VII.

(THE BEAUTIFUL PATIENT.)

TEN minutes had scarcely elapsed since Lord Ellingham took his departure from the doctor's abode, and the learned gentleman himself was still pondering on the strange communication which had been made to him, when a loud and hasty knock at the front-door echoed through the house.

A servant answered the summons, and in a few

moment, ushered Tom Rain into the presence of Dr. Lascelles.

"Sir," said the visitor, who was painfully excited, "a female—a young woman in whom I am deeply interested—has taken poison. Come with me this instant, I implore you."

Dr. Lascelles snatched up his hat, and followed Rainford without pausing to ask a single question. A hackney-coach was waiting at the door. the two individuals leapt in; and the vehicle drove rapidly away.

The doctor now thought it expedient to make a few inquiries relative to the case which was about to engage his attention.

"What poison has the young woman taken?" he asked.

"Arsenic," was the reply: "for I found the paper which had contained it."

"And how long ago?"

"Ten minutes before I knocked at your door."

"Has there been any vomiting?"

"I did not delay a single moment in hastening to fetch you, after the unhappy creature took the poison; and therefore I am unable to answer that question."

The physician remained silent; and in a few minutes the coach stopped at a house in South Moulton Street.

The door was opened by a servant girl; and Rainford led the physician to a bed-room on the second floor, whither the servant girl followed them.

By the light of a candle placed upon a chest of drawers, Dr. Lascelles beheld a young female of great beauty, and with no other garment on than her night-dress, writhing in excruciating agonies upon the bed. From the reply given by the servant-girl to a question put by the doctor, it appeared that the young lady had been seized with violent vomiting the moment after Tom Rain had left to procure medical aid; and Lascelles accordingly proceeded to adopt the usual treatment which is pursued in such cases.*

In the course of half an hour the patient was pronounced to be out of danger; and Tom Rain, who had in the meantime manifested the utmost anxiety and uneasiness, now exhibited a proportionate liveliness of joy.

* The first great object which we must keep in view, is to promote the speedy evacuation of the stomach: if the poison itself has not produced vomiting, from ten to twenty grains of sulphate of zinc must be given if it can be readily procured, this generally acts as a powerful emetic. If this, however, cannot be obtained, a mustard emetic should be administered, and the vomiting promoted by drinking large quantities of barley water, linseed tea, milk or tepid water. the two first being of a mucilaginous nature are to be preferred; tickling the back of the throat with a feather will often cause the stomach to reject its contents. It frequently happens that this treatment alone is sufficient for relief in accidents of this nature. After the stomach has been cleansed by the emetic, &c., as described above, lime-water, or chalk diffused in water, if it can be procured, may be given in large quantities Hahnemann has recommended soap to be dissolved in water, in the proportion of a pound to four pints, and a tea-cupful to be given every five or six minutes; this undoubtedly is the best treatment if lime water is not at hand. Powdered charcoal may also be administered with advantage if the other remedies are not immediately attainable. The above remedies may be used with some degree of confidence, although their good effects are not sufficiently certain to establish them as "antidotes"—*Ready Remedies in Cases of Poisoning, &c. By James Johnson M.R.C.S.*

"Shall I recover it, sir! Ch! tell me—shall I recover?" asked the young woman in a strange, thrilling, piteous tone, as she fixed her large dark eyes upon the countenance of the physician.

"You are in a fair way to survive this mad—this wicked attempt upon your life," answered Lascelles, in a compassionately reproachful rather than a severe tone. "But you must be kept quiet—and all sources of mental irritation must be removed or forgotten as much as possible," he added, glancing towards Rainford.

"Oh! sir—do not imagine for a moment that he will upbraid or ill-treat me!" exclaimed the young woman, darting a fond look towards Tom Rain: then, drawing a long and heavy respiration, she said, in a different and more subdued tone, "In justice to *him*, doctor, I must assure you that no harshness on *his* part urged me to this shocking deed: but—"

"Yes, my dearest girl," interrupted Rain, rushing to the bed, and taking one of her hands which he pressed fondly to his lips, "I *did* upbraid you—I *did* speak severely to you—"

"No—no—not more than I deserved!" cried the young woman: "for I was very wrong—oh! I was very wrong! But say, Tom, can you forgive me?"

"He does forgive you—he has forgiven you," exclaimed the physician. "And now abandon that subject, which is naturally a painful one. Tomorrow morning I shall call and see you early."

Dr. Lascelles took up his hat to depart, and Rainford followed him into the passage, where he said in a low but earnest tone, "One word, sir, in private, Please to step into this room."

And he conducted the physician into a front apartment, the door of which he carefully closed.

"In the first place, sir," began Rainford, when they were thus alone together, "allow me to thank you for your prompt and effectual aid in this most painful affair:"—and he slipped five guineas into the doctor's hand. "Secondly, let me implore of you to grant the favour which I am about to ask."

"Speak sir," said Lascelles; "and if your request be not inconsistent with my honour as a physician and as a gentleman—"

"Far from it," exclaimed Rainford. "It is this:—Promise me, on your solemn word of honour *as a physician and as a gentleman*, that, when once your professional visits here have ceased, you will forget that you ever beheld that young woman who is lying in the next room. Promise me, I say, in the most binding manner, that should you ever henceforth meet her, alone or in company, you will not even appear to recognise her, much less attempt to speak to her, unless you be formally introduced to her, when you will consider your acquaintance with her to begin only from the moment of such introduction. Promise me all this, sir, I implore you—for you know not what vitally important interests may be compromised by your conduct in this matter."

"I have not the slightest objection to tranquillise your mind by giving the pledge which you demand," returned Dr. Lascelles, without a moment's hesitation.

"A thousand thanks, sir!" cried Rainford joyfully. "You fully understand the precise nature of the reserve and silence which I require?"

"Never to allude in any way to the incident of this night, nor to appear to recognise elsewhere nor

henceforth the young lady whom I have just seen," said the doctor. "You may rely upon me: the secret shall never transpire from my lips."

"Again I express my gratitude," cried Rainford, with undisguised satisfaction.

Dr. Lascelles then took his leave; and, as he retraced his way to Grafton Street, he never once ceased to think of the strange promise which he had been required to give, in respect to the beautiful creature who had made so resolute an attempt upon her own existence.

On the following morning, shortly after eight o'clock, the physician's cab stopped at the door of the house in South Moulton Street; but, to his surprise, he learnt from the landlady that Mr. and Mrs. Jameson (by which names Rainford and the young woman had been known at their lodgings) had taken their departure at seven o'clock, before it was even light.

"Had they resided long with you?" inquired the doctor.

"Only a week, sir," was the answer. "The lady kept herself very quiet, and seldom went out. When she did, she always had a thick black veil over her face; and, you may think it strange, sir—but it's true for all that—what is, sir, that I never once caught a glimpse of her countenance all the time she was in this house. But the servant-gal says she was very beautiful—very beautiful indeed! You must, however, be able to judge whether that report is true or not, sir?"

"I know little, and think less of those matters, my good woman," said the doctor hastily; and, returning to his cab, he drove off, to visit another patient.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVEN DIALS

THERE is not in all London a more extraordinary locality than that which bears the denomination of Seven Dials.

Situate in the midst of one of the lowest and worst neighbourhoods throughout the metropolis, and forming a focus where seven streets, converging towards that point, meet like as many streams flowing into a common reservoir, the open spot of ground called Seven Dials is a lounge for all the idle vagabonds and ill-looking persons, men and women, who occupy the cellars and garrets in the vicinity.

From the centre of the open space alluded to, the eyes may plunge their glances down into the circumjacent thoroughfares—narrow, dark, filthy, and formed by dwellings of an appearance so miserable or so repulsive that they equally pain the heart and shock the sight.

If the wanderer amidst the mazes of this vast city were desired to point out the chosen abode of poverty and crime, taking as his guide the physical aspect of all the worst neighbourhoods, he would probably indicate Seven Dials and its branching streets.

The shops are all of the lowest and dirtiest description; nauseous odours impregnate the atmosphere. In winter the streets are knee-deep in mud, save when hardened by the frost; and in summer they are strewn with the putrefying remnants of vegetables, offal, and filth of every description.

Half-naked children paddle about in the mire or wallow on the heaps of decomposing substances just alluded to,—greedily devouring the parings of turnips and carrots, sucking the marrow out of the rotting bones, and rejoicing when they happen to find a mouldy crust, a morsel of putrid meat, or the maggot-eaten head of a fish. Neglected beings, too, are they—knowing nothing save blows, curses, and hunger at home, and learning nought save every corrupt habit and ruinous vice abroad.

How can we be surprised if such an infancy becomes imbued with those evil principles which gaols and treadmills only tend afterwards to confirm, and which give ample promise of occupation for turnkeys, penal-settlements, and the hangman?

The Established Church is maintained at an annual expense of several millions sterling; the clergy belonging to that Church claim the right of educating and instructing the people:—and yet in no country in the civilised world is there such an appalling amount of juvenile depravity as in England!

For ourselves, we declare—we repeat, that our Government, our Legislature, our Clergy, and our Great Landowners are all guilty of the blackest turpitude, in permitting hundreds of thousands—aye, millions of children to be neglected in so horrible a manner. If a child be seized with a malignant, infectious, and dangerous disease, what would be said of a father who looked on indifferently—who omitted to call in medical advice—and who beheld, with equal calmness, the furious malady spreading amongst the rest of his offspring! Should we not denounce—should we not execrate such a man, as a monster deserving of any penalty which our statutes could inflict?

Yes—a thousand times yes!

By a parity of reasoning, then, do we hold up to, abhorrence those men who seize upon the reins of power merely to gratify their own selfish ambition; also those men who accept seats in the legislative assemblies, and fritter away the time of a great nation in their own party squabbles,—those men, too, who put on black gowns, preach sermons as a duty rendered in return for the enjoyment of enormous revenues, and then declaim against the wickedness of those millions whom they do not attempt to reform,—and, lastly, those men who wring the sweat from the poor man's brow, to distil pearls for themselves, but who care not for the welfare of that poor man's offspring!

Hundreds of thousands of pounds are annually subscribed to further the objects of foreign missions, the scene of whose labours is in far-off lands, scarcely known to us by name, and amongst a race with whom our sympathies cannot exist;—but beneath our very eyes—crossing our paths—constantly displaying their loathsome rags to our view, are small children innumerable, whose only training is for the prison, the hulks, and the gallows!

Talk not to us of christianizing Barbarians in the remote islands of the South Seas, when the children of so many of our own fellow-countrymen and country-women are but barbarous Christians at home!

Let the reader who imagines that we exaggerate the amount of the evil we denounce,—let him take his stand, any evening, in the midst of Seven Dials, and well consider the scenes around him.

It is said that there are Seven Cardinal Sins: at

the point where we would wish our sceptical reader to post himself, he may command a view of seven streets, each one presenting to his contemplation some new phase in the common sphere of hideous poverty and terrible demoralisation.

Mark the population of that neighbourhood, consisting of seven principal streets, with all their connecting lanes and alleys—with their dark, filthy courts, and their murderous-looking nooks and passages!

Of what does this population consist?

Men brutalised by drink, or rendered desperate by poverty, and in either state ready to commit a crime,—women of squalid, wasted, and miserable appearance, who, being beaten by their husbands and fathers, revenge themselves upon their children or their little brothers and sisters,—poor shopkeepers, who endeavour to make up for the penury of their petty dealings by cheating their famished customers,—wretched boys and girls, whose growth is stunted by suffering, whose forms are attenuated through want, and whose minds are poisoned by the scenes of vice, dissipation, and immorality which open upon them at their very birth!

What hope—what promise for the future do such beings as these hold out?

In consternation and sorrow, mingled with the most awful misgivings, do we survey the picture which we are now compelled to draw;—and our feelings are thus painful, because we know this picture to be correct!

And yet we call our country "MERRY ENGLAND!"

Merciful Heavens! what a mockery is this name! Can England be merry while the most hideous poverty is the lot of half her population; while her workhouses are crowded with miserable beings who must for ever resign all hope or idea of again enjoying the comforts of "home;" while the streets are filled with loathsome wretches, clad in filthy rags, which barely cover them,—shivering with the cold, or fainting beneath the intolerable heat—and spurned from the doors not only of the rich, but also of the very officers appointed to relieve distress; while the poor mother, maddened with the idea of her own destitution and houseless condition, presses her famishing child to her breast which yields no milk, and then rushes in desperation, to consign the innocent being to the waters of the nearest stream; while the wretched father stifles his children, that he may hush for ever in their throats the cry of "Bread! bread!"—that vain and useless cry to which he cannot respond; while innocent babes and prattling infants bear upon their countenances and exhibit in their attenuated frames all the traces of the dread and agonising pangs of a constant gnawing—craving—never satisfied hunger; and while hundreds annually *die* around us of starvation and absolute want?

Merry England, indeed! What? is England joyous when the shop of the pawnbroker thrives royally upon the immense interest wrung from the very vitals of the poor; when the gaols, the hospitals, and the workhouses are more numerous than the churches; when the hulks are swarming with convicts pent up in frightful floating dungeons, amidst the foetid atmosphere; when the streets throng with unfortunate girls, who ask to be redeemed from an appalling traffic, but who see no avenue of escape from their loathsome calling; when the voice

of starvation, the voice of crime, the voice of discontent, and the voice of barbarian ignorance, echo up to Heaven, and form such a chorus as could scarcely be expected to meet the ears beyond the precincts of hell; and when seven-tenths of the entire population are wretched—oppressed—enslaved—trampled on—miserable—degraded—demoralised!

Merry England!!!

But let us continue the thread of our narrative.

Two of the thoroughfares which converge to Seven Dials, bear each the name of Earl Street.

Passing from High Street, St. Giles's, towards St. Martin's Lane, we must request the reader to turn with us to the right, into that Earl Street which lies between the Dials and one extremity of Monmouth Street.

Half way up Earl Street stood a house of even a darker and more gloomy appearance than its companions. Its door-way was lower than the level of the street, and was reached by descending three steps. The windows were small; and, as many of the panes were broken, the holes were mended with pieces of dirty paper, or stopped up with old rags. Altogether, there was something so poverty-stricken, and yet so sinister, about the appearance of that tottering, dingy, repulsive-looking dwelling, that no one possessing an article of jewellery about his person, or having gold in his pocket, would have chosen to venture amongst its inmates.

And who were those inmates? The neighbours scarcely knew. Certain it was, however, that over the rickety door of the house were painted the words—TOBIAS BUNCE, TAILOR; but few were the jobs which Mr. Bunce ever obtained from the inhabitants in the vicinity; for his manners were too reserved—too repulsive, to gain favour with the class of persons who might have patronised him. And yet there appeared to be no signs of absolute poverty in that dwelling. Mrs. Bunce was one of the adjacent butcher's best customers. A public-house in the Dials was known to be regularly visited by her for the beer at dinner and supper times; and pints of gin were occasionally purchased by the same mysterious customer at the same establishment. She was as averse to gossiping as her husband; and her neighbours declared that they could not make her out at all. She always paid ready money for every thing she had; and therefore the tradespeople were the staunch defenders of the Bunces, whenever a word of suspicion was uttered against them.

Who, then, were these Bunces?

Let us step inside their dwelling, and see if we can ascertain.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening, a few days after the incidents related in the preceding chapters, that Toby Bunce, his wife, Old Death, and the lad Jacob sat down to tea in the ground-floor back room of the house which we have been describing.

Toby Bunce was a short, thin, pale-faced, sneaking-looking man of about forty. He was dressed in a suit of very shabby black; and his linen was not remarkable for cleanliness. His coarse brown hair was suffered to grow to a considerable length; and, as he seldom treated it to an acquaintance with the comb, it hung in matted curls over his shoulders. His nails were equally neglected, and resembled claws terminating with blackened points.

His better-half—as Mrs. Bunce indeed was, not

only figuratively, but also literally—was a tall, thin, scraggy, lantern-faced woman, with a sharp green eye, a vixenish pug-nose, and a querulous voice, for although she was excessively reserved when she went out “to do her marketing,” she made up for that silence abroad by an extra amount of garrulity at home. Her age exceeded by a year or two that of her husband, and, as she was totally devoid of that sentiment which is so generally ascribed to the sex—we mean vanity—she did not scruple to acknowledge the above fact. Indeed, she often advanced it as an argument to prove that she must know better than he, and as a reason for her assertion and maintenance of petticoat government. But if vanity were not her failing, avarice was her ruling vice; and to gratify her love for gold she never hesitated at a crime.

In this latter respect Mr. Bunce was no better than his spouse—save that his anxiety to obtain money was not always equalled by his readiness to face the danger occasionally involved in procuring it. Any act of turpitude that might be accomplished safely and quietly, would find no moral opponent in the person of Toby Bunce; but when some little daring or display of firmness was required, he was forced to supply himself with an artificial energy through the medium of the gin-bottle.

The room to which we have introduced our readers was furnished with bare necessities, and nothing more. A rickety, greasy deal table; four or five of the commonest description of rush-bottomed chairs; a long form, to accommodate extra company; an old portable cupboard, fitting into one of the angles of the apartment; and a shelf to serve as a larder,—these were the principal articles of the domestic economy. The table was spread with a varied assortment of crockery, none of the cups matching with the saucers, and no two cups or no two saucers alike.

Toby Bunce, having succeeded in inducing the kettle to boil, by means of sundry bits of wood sparingly applied, his wife Betsy made the tea, while Jacob cut the bread-and-butter.

“I wonder whether Tom will keep his appointment?” said Old Death, as he sipped his tea. “It’s a full hour past the time that I told him to be here.”

“And we’ve been a waiting for him till the fire got so low that it took a power of wood to make it burn up again,” observed Toby Bunce.

“Spouse it did?” cried his wife. “You know very well that we do ‘nt care about any expense when our best friend Mr. Bones is with us,” she added, glancing towards Old Death; for the Bunces were amongst the very few of that individual’s acquaintances who knew his real name.

“And yet I should think he would not fail,” continued Old Death in a musing strain. “His conduct seemed straight-forward and right enough the very first day we agreed to terms; and he even gave me my regulars in a matter that I ‘d nothing to do with. But it was well for him that he did so; or else he ‘d have been laid up in lavender for want of bail.”

“Bertinshaw and Watkins did it pretty tidy,” said Jacob, who was making prodigious inroads upon the bread-and-butter.

“Keep your observations to yourself,” growled Old Death in a surly tone. “Remember, I have n’t

forgot your negligence in losing sight of Tom Rain the other day, when he left the police-office.”

“It was n’t my fault,” returned the lad, his dark eyes flashed angrily, “I kept lurking about the court after I had been up here to tell you that Dykes had nabbed Mr. Rainford: I saw him go over to the coffee-house soon after he was discharged—I followed him when he went in a coach to Pall Mall—I dogged him back again to Bow Street—and then—”

“And then when the Jewess’s case was over, you saw him come out, and you lost sight of him,” interrupted Old Death angrily. “But never mind,” he added, softening a little; “I will set you to watch him another day when you’ve nothing better to do, and we will find out all I want to know about him.”

“When did you see him last?” inquired Toby Bunce.

“This morning, at Tullock’s; and—”

Old Death was interrupted by a knock at the street door, to which summons Jacob hastened to respond.

In a few moments, he returned, accompanied by Tom Rain, who sauntered into the room, with a complaisant air and the chimney-pot hat stuck on the right side of his head.

“So you are come at last, Tom,” said Bones, *alias* Old Death, his toothless jaws grinning a gastly satisfaction. “Well, better late than never. But let me introduce you to my very particular friends Mr. and Mrs. Bunce; and as they are good friends of mine, they will be good friends to you. This crib of theirs is convenient in more ways than one,” added the old man significantly; “and you will find it so if you ever want to lay up for a time until the storm, which must menace one sometimes, blows over.”

“The hint may not prove useless at a pinch,” said Tom carelessly, as he seated himself on the form. “But there’s some one present whose name you’ve not yet mentioned, old chap?”

And he glanced towards the sickly lad, who was still occupied with the edible portion of the repast.

“Oh! that’s my Mercury—my messenger—my confidant—or any thing else you like to call him,” said Bones. “His name is Jacob Smith, for want of a better—and he’s a perfect treasure in his way. He can scent an officer two streets off, and would prove the best scout that ever a general commanding an army could possibly employ. Now you know his qualifications; and if you ever want to make use of him, he is at your service.”

“Well, my lad,” exclaimed Tom Rain, “your master gives a good character of you; and mind you continue to deserve it,” he added, with an ironical smile. “But what is to be done now, old fellow?”

This question was addressed to Bones, who accordingly prepared himself to answer it.

“There’s something to be done to-morrow night, my dear boy,” began the old villain, his dark eyes gleaming from beneath their shaggy, overhanging brows; “and there’s money—much money—to be got. But the thing is a difficult one, and requires great tact as well as courage.”

“You must suppose beforehand that I am the person to manage it properly,” said Rain; “or I should think you would not have applied to me.”

“Very true, Tom,” returned Old Death, with a sepulchral chuckle: “very true! The fact is,

you are a dashing, genteel-looking, and well-spoken fellow when you choose; and you can insinuate yourself into the good graces of the best-born gentleman in the land. I am sure you can do this—don't you think you can, Tom?"

"I should rather fancy I can," replied Rainford, by no means displeased with the compliment just paid him. "But go on—explain yourself—and we shall then see what can be done."

"Listen attentively," said Old Death. "Between Streatham and Norwood there stands a pretty but lonely house, occupied by a gentleman named Torrens. He is a widower, and has two daughters. The eldest of these girls is to be married the day after to-morrow to a certain Mr. Frank Curtis, the nephew of the wealthy Sir Christopher Blunt. It appears that Mr. Torrens has fallen into some difficulty through over-speculation in building houses at Norwood; and Sir Christopher has consented to advance him five thousand pounds, on condition that this match takes place. For the girl, it seems, is totally opposed to it: she has another lover whom she loves—and she hates Mr. Frank Curtis. But the father insists on sacrificing his daughter, to whom Curtis is greatly attached; and Curtis possesses influence enough over his uncle Sir Christopher to persuade him to advance the money."

"All this is clear enough," said Rain; "and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to baulk Sir Christopher, Frank Curtis, and the selfish old father. But I do not see how the business can in any way benefit us."

"I will tell you, my dear boy," replied Old Death, with another chuckle expressive of deep satisfaction. "To-morrow evening Sir Christopher, the nephew, and Sir Christopher's lawyer will set out for Torrens Cottage, as the place is called. They will settle all the preliminary business with the father to-morrow night, so that the marriage may take place the first thing on the ensuing morning."

"Well?" said Tom inquiringly, seeing that Old Death paused.

"And two thousand pounds out of the five will be conveyed from London to Torrens Cottage to-morrow night," continued Bones: "unless," he added significantly, "something happens to stop the money on its way."

"But who will have the money about him—Sir Christopher, the nephew, or the lawyer?" demanded Tom.

"Ah! that's the point to ascertain," cried Old Death. "You must exercise your tact in solving this doubt; and your courage will afterwards effect the rest. Did I not say that the business required alike tact and courage?"

"You did indeed," answered Rain; "and I can scarcely see how the deuce the thing is to be managed. Still two thousand pounds would prove very welcome. But how came you to learn all this?"

"The knight's servant, my dear boy, is in my pay," returned Old Death, with a triumphant grin. "Ah! I have many gentlemen's and noblemen's domestics devoted to my interests in the same manner; and by their means I learn a great deal. But to return to our present business. Two thousand pounds are to be paid down as an earnest of the bargain to-morrow night; and those two thousand

pounds will be much better appropriated to our uses."

"I perfectly agree with you, old fellow," said Rain. "Could not the knight's servant inform you who is likely to take charge of the money?"

"Impossible!" cried Bones. "He will most probably accompany the party; and—"

"How will they go?" demanded Rain, a thought striking him.

"On horseback," answered Old Death. "Sir Christopher and his nephew have a great opinion of themselves as riders; and the lawyer, Mr. Howard, is a sporting character. It is, therefore, sure that they will all go on horseback."

"Then leave the rest to me," cried Tom Rain, snapping his fingers. "What time do they set out?"

"At six o'clock," was the answer.

"Good again," observed Tom. "It's as dark then as at midnight, this time of the year. Say no more upon the subject; the thing is just the same as if it was done—provided your information is correct, and no change takes place in the plan as at present laid down by these gentlemen. One word, however;—describe Sir Christopher's servant to me."

"A short—thin—dapper-made fellow—dark curly hair—face marked with the small-pox," replied Old Death. "Drab livery, turned up with red. His name is John Jeffreys."

"Enough," said Tom. "I shall call at Tullock's to-morrow between two and three in the afternoon; and if you have anything fresh to communicate, you can either leave a note or meet me there. If I neither see nor hear from you at that time and place, I shall consider that all remains as you have now represented. You have nothing more to say at present?"

"Nothing," returned Bones, after a moment's reflection.

"Won't you take a drop of brandy-and-water, Mr. Rainford—just a *leetle* drop?" inquired Toby Bunce, with a deferential glance towards his better half.

"A leetle drop, stupid!—a good big drop, you mean!" cried the shrew. "Is n't Mr. Rainford a friend of Mr. Bones?—and ain't all Mr. Bones's friends *our* friends? I am sure if Mr. Rainford would drink a—a quar—a *pint* of brandy," she added, emphatically defining the quantity she felt disposed to place at the service of the new acquaintance, "he is quite welcome."

"No, thank'ee," said Rainford. "I must be off. The business of to-morrow night requires consideration; and—"

He was interrupted by a knock at the street-door; and Toby Bunce hastened to answer the summons.

CHAPTER IX.

A DEATH-SCENE.—LOCK'S FIELDS.

THE room-door was left open; and the inmates could therefore hear every thing that took place in the passage.

Toby Bunce opened the street-door cautiously, and said, "Who's there?"

"In the name of heaven, grant me a night's lodging," exclaimed the appealing voice of a female: "if not for myself—at least for this poor dear child!"

"Toby, shut the door!" screamed the querulous tones of Mrs. Bunce from the back-room. "We do n't want beggars and poor children here."

"Stay!" cried Tom Rain: "never be hard-hearted!"

And, hastening to the street-door, he saw, by the light of a shop-window opposite, the form of a miserable-looking female crouching upon the steps, and with one arm round the neck of a little boy who was crying bitterly.

"Come in, my good woman," said Rainford. "I will pay any expenses that your presence may entail on the people of the house:—come in, I say."

But the poor creature fell back insensible.

"Toby, take care of the child," cried Tom Rain in an authoritative tone; "while I lift the woman off the steps."

And, suiting the action to the word, he raised the senseless being in his arms, and conveyed her into the passage, Toby following with the little boy, who seemed to be about five or six years old.

"Surely you're mad, Tom," exclaimed Old Death, advancing from the back-room, "to bring strangers into this house."

"I should be a brute to see a dying woman turned away from the door of this or any other house," said Rainford firmly. "Stand back, and let me have my way. My purse shall satisfy the Bunces for any trouble this business may give them."

"Well, well—be it as you will," growled Old Death: then, in a hasty whisper to Betsy Bunce, he added, "You had better let him do as he likes. He is a queer fellow, but very useful—and must not be offended."

Thus advised, and cheered moreover by Rain's liberal promise of payment, Mrs. Bunce suddenly exhibited a vast amount of sympathy on behalf of the poor creature; and, having fetched a candle from the back-room, she lighted Rainford, who carried the still senseless woman in his arms, up stairs to a chamber where there was a sordid kind of bed.

Rainford placed his burthen on the miserable pallet, and Betsy Bunce applied such restoratives as the circumscribed economy of her household furnished.

"In the mean time Toby had brought the little boy into the chamber; and the child, hastening towards the bed, exclaimed, "Mamma—dear mamma—speak to me—why do n't you speak to me?"

The woman opened her eyes languidly; but the moment they encountered the face of the child, they were lighted up with joy; and snatched the boy to her breast, she murmured in a faint tone, "I thought I had lost you, Charles—I dreamt that we were separated! Oh! my head—it seems to split!"

And she pressed her open palm to her forehead with all the appearance of intense suffering.

We must pause a moment to observe, that this woman seemed to be about five-and-thirty years of age; that she was dressed in widow's weeds of the coarsest materials; and that her entire aspect denoted dreadful privations and great sufferings, mental as well as physical. The boy was also attired in mourning garments; and though his little cheeks were wan, and his form emaciated, still was he a very interesting child.

"My good woman," said Tom Rain, approaching the bed, "banish all misgivings relative to the present; for you shall be taken care of."

Then, turning towards Mrs. Bunce, he directed her to procure food, and to send Jacob for a surgeon.

"No—no, it's useless," cried the poor woman, alluding to the latter order. "I feel that I am dying—my last hour is come!"

The child threw his little arms about her neck, and wept piteously.

"Oh! my God!" cried the wretched stranger, "who will now take care of you, my poor dear—dear little Charles! I who have been to you as a mother—"

"Yes—you are my mamma—my own mamma," exclaimed the child, his heart ready to burst, although he scarcely understood the real nature of the misgivings which oppressed him.

"Sir," said the woman, after a few moments of profound silence, during which the sobbings of the boy and the uneasy palpitations of her own breast were alone heard in the chamber,—“sir,” she said, addressing herself abruptly to Rainford, “you spoke to me kindly—you look kindly upon me,—and, if I may judge by your countenance, you possess a kind heart—”

"Speak, poor woman," cried Rain, softened almost to tears. "If there is anything I can do for you, confide in me—and I swear—"

"The gratitude of a dying being is all that I can offer you in return for what I am about to ask," interrupted the woman in a faint, yet hurried tone,—for she seemed to feel that she had not long to live. "Draw near, sir—there—and now listen attentively. Dreadful privation—exposure to the cold—sleeping in the fields—and painful wanderings have reduced me to this state. But I shall die contented—nay, even happy, if I thought—"

"I understand you," cried Rain. "You are anxious for the welfare of this boy? Compose your mind—banish those painful reflections—I swear to protect him!"

There was something so earnest and sincere in the manner, the voice, and the countenance of Rainford, who was a creature of the most generous impulses, that the dying woman believed him; and her heart bounded with fervent gratitude.

Then, making a sign for Rainford to draw nearer to her still, she collected all her remaining force, to utter a few last words; but physical exhaustion almost completely choked her utterance.

"This boy," she murmured in a faint and dying voice, "is not mine. Do not weep, Charles, love—I am not your mamma—although I love you—as if you was my own child. But the moment you were born—in secret—and mystery—the nurse brought you to me—all having been so arranged—and—from that moment I—but, my God! I am dying!—oh! give me strength to declare that—your mother—is—"

"Speak, speak," cried Tom Rain: "breathe but the name of his mother—I shall catch it—and I declare most solemnly—O, God! she is dead!"

And it was so! Vain were her last, last efforts to give utterance to the name which trembled upon her tongue: the death-rattle stifled the words in her throat—her eyes glazed—her countenance settled in inanimation—and she was no more!

The little Charles would not believe that she was really dead. To him she only appeared to sleep;—



and this infantine delusion Tom Rain gradually dissipated, making him aware of his sad bereavement in so delicate a manner, that a stranger would have believed him to be a father himself as well as an individual of the most upright and noble principles.

But if Rainford's morality was in some points of the most indifferent nature, he nevertheless possessed kind feelings and a generous heart; and the tears trickled down his cheeks, as he exerted himself to console the little stranger.

Children seem to be endowed with an intuitive power of discrimination between those who would treat them well, and those whose dispositions are severe and harsh; and Charles speedily acquired confidence in the good intentions of Rainford.

At length, when Tom fancied that he had obtained some degree of influence over the boy's mind, he led him away from the chamber where the poor woman had breathed her last.

Old Death had remained in the room below; and Jacob had been sent to fetch a surgeon, who now arrived, but departed again immediately upon learning that his services could no longer be rendered available. Toby and Mrs. Bunce had

quitted the chamber of death the moment Rain ejaculated, "O God! she is dead!"—and thus the child had no leisure to take particular notice of any one save the individual who manifested so much kindness towards him.

Fearing that the repulsive appearance of Old Death might alarm the boy, and even fill his mind with misgivings relative to the person who now took charge of him, Rainford stopped in the dark passage down stairs; and calling Mrs. Bunce from the back-room, he placed five guineas in her hand, saying, "The burial of that poor creature who has just breathed her last must be your care. See that it is performed decently; and if there are any papers about her person—any proofs of who she is—keep them for me. Be faithful in this respect—and what I have now given you may be considered as an earnest of additional recompense."

Rainford then left the house, leading the boy by the hand.

Proceeding to the nearest hackney-coach stand, Tom hired one of the vehicles, and desired to be driven to the Elephant and Castle.

Previously, however, to entering the vehicle, the

thoughtful Tom Rain purchased some of the very best cakes which a shop in such a neighbourhood could produce; and, though the little boy kept sobbing as he repeated to himself, "Mamma is dead,"—for he was too young to understand that she had denied this maternity with her dying breath,—yet he ate greedily of the food—for he was famished.

Rainford said but little to him, beyond a few occasional cheering and consolatory words, as they rode along, because the heavy rumbling of the vehicle rendered it difficult to hear what was uttered within.

In about three-quarters of an hour the coach stopped at the Elephant and Castle; and Rainford, conducting the boy tenderly by the hand, plunged into the maze of streets which form a neighbourhood requiring a detailed description.

Any one who is acquainted with that part of London, or who, with the map of the great metropolis before him, takes the trouble to follow us in this portion of our narrative, will understand us when we state that, almost immediately behind the Elephant and Castle tavern, there is a considerable district totally *unexplored* by thousands and thousands of persons dwelling in other parts of the English capital. This district is now bounded on the north by the New Kent Road, on the east by the Kent or Greenwich Road, on the south by Walworth, and on the west by the Walworth Road. Built upon a low, damp, and unhealthy soil, the dwellings of the poor there throng in frightful abundance,—forming narrow streets half choked up with dirt, miserable alleys where the very air is stagnant, and dark courts, to enter which seems like going into the fetid vault of a church. Many of the streets, that appear to have been huddled together without any architectural plan, but merely upon a studied system of crowding together as many hovels as possible, have their back windows looking upon ditches, the black mire and standing water of which exhale vapours sufficiently noxious to breed a pestilence. When the sun shines upon these noisome ditches, their surface displays a thousand prismatic hues, thrown out by the decomposing offal and putrid vegetables which have been emptied into those open sewers. But sewers they cannot be called—for instead of carrying off the filth of the neighbourhood, those ditches preserve it stagnant.

A considerable portion of the district we are describing is known by the name of Lock's Fields; and the horrible condition of this locality can only be properly understood by a visit. The pen cannot convey an adequate idea of the loathsome squalor of that poverty—the heart-rending proofs of that wretchedness—and the revolting examples of that utter demoralization, which characterise this section of the metropolis. The houses for the most part contain each four rooms; every room serving as the domicile of a separate family. Perhaps one of the members of such a family may be afflicted with some infectious malady: there he must lie upon his flock mattress, or his bundle of rags, or his heap of straw, until he become, through neglect, so offensive as to render one minute with him intolerable; and yet his relatives—four, five, or even six in number—are compelled to sleep in the same apartment with him, inhaling the stench from that mass of putrefaction, hearing his groans, breathing the steam from his lungs, and swarming with the myriads of loathsome animalculæ engendered by the filth of the place. In another room, perhaps, we shall find some

old man, living by himself—starving upon the miserable pittance obtained by picking up bones or rags, doing an odd job now and then for a neighbour, and filling up the intervals of such pursuits by begging,—his entire furniture consisting of a cup, a kettle, and a knife—no chair, no table—but with a heap of rubbish in one corner for a bed, on which he sleeps with his clothes on. In a third room there is most likely a family consisting of a man and his wife, who at night occupy one mattress, and their grown-up sons and daughters who all pig together upon another. Shame and decency exist not amongst them—because they could never have known either. They have all been accustomed from their infancy to each other's nakedness; and, as their feelings are brutalised by such a mode of existence, they suffer no scruples to oppose that fearful intercourse which their sensuality suggests. Thus—for we *must* speak plainly, as we speak the *truth*—the very wretchedness of the poor, which compels this family commingling in one room and as it were in one bed, leads to incest—horrible, revolting incest! The fourth room in the house which we take for our example of the dwellings in Lock's Fields, is occupied by the landlord or landlady, or both; and there is perhaps no more morality nor cleanliness in their chamber than in either of the others.

The shops in Lock's Fields are naturally in keeping with the means and habits of their customers. Beer-shops and public-houses abound: the lower and the poorer the locality, the greater the number of such establishments. But who can wonder Crime requires its stimulants—and poverty its consolation. Men drink to nerve themselves to perpetrate misdeeds which are attended with peril: women drink to supply that artificial flow of spirits necessary to the maintenance of a career of prostitution;—and the honest poor drink to save themselves from the access of maddening despair. Children drink also, because they see their parents drink, and because they have acquired the taste from their earliest infancy;—and thus beer-shops and public-houses thrive most gloriously in the most wretched neighbourhoods.

Lock's Fields abound with small "general shops," where every thing is sold in the minutest detail—a pennyworth of sugar, a penny-furthing-worth of tea, a farthing candle, or a quarter of a pound of bacon for a penny. There are also many eating-houses where leg-of-beef soup can be procured for five farthings the bowl. The knackers do a good business with the owners of those establishments. Tripe-shops are likewise far from rare; and upon their boards in the open windows, may be seen gory slices of black-looking liver, tongues and brains in a dish, sheep's heads, huge cow-heels, chitterlings, piles of horses' flesh and rolls of boiled offal upon sticks—the two last-mentioned species of article being intended for cat's-meat,—but the whole heaped pell-mell together, loathsome to behold, and emitting odours of the most fœtid and nauseating description. Coal-sheds, where potatoes and greens may likewise be purchased, abound in Lock's Fields; as do also pie-shops and that kind of eating-houses where pudding fried in grease, stocking-pudding, and sop-in-the-pan are displayed in the windows, to tempt with their succulent appearance the appetites of hungry men passing to their work, or of half-famished children wearied of playing in the gutter.

It is wretched—heart-rending to linger on a des-

cription of this kind: but we must endeavour to make it as complete as possible. The generality of the inhabitants of Lock's Fields are in a state of barbarian ignorance. Nine-tenths of the children, even of ten or twelve years old, are unable to read, and know not who Jesus Christ is, nor that the Saviour of Mankind suffered upon the cross to save *them*, as well as the proudest peers or the most brilliant peeresses that shine in the realms of fashion. Look more closely at the aspect of the population in Lock's Fields. What care is depicted upon the pale cheek of that emaciated woman who is hanging the *one* change of linen upon the elder-bushes skirting the black ditch behind her dwelling! And yet she is better off than many of her neighbours—because her family does possess the *one* change of linen! Behold that man sitting on the threshold of his door, smoking his pipe:—his elbows rest upon his knees—he stares vacantly before him—not even the opiate influence of tobacco soothes him. He is thinking of what will become of his wife and children when he shall be out of work—because the job on which he has lately been engaged will be finished on the coming Saturday. His wife comes out to speak to him—and he answers her harshly: his children approach him, and endeavour to climb up his knees—but he knocks them away. Yet that man is not brutal by nature: he loves his wife and children—and was even debating within himself whether he should not soon turn thief in order to support them, when they thus accosted him and were repulsed. Let another person insult his wife—let a stranger lay a finger upon that man's children, and the demon will be raised within his breast. But he speaks harshly and treats them all brutally, because he is miserable—because he is dissatisfied with every thing and every body—because he is reduced to despair. The unfeeling aspect of the cold world around him—that world which frowns so sternly upon poverty, and smiles so sweetly upon wealth—has rendered him unfeeling. His hard fate drives him to the public-house:—talk of the infamy of which that man is guilty in spending a few pence—the pence which would buy his children more bread—upon beer or gin,—it is ridiculous! That man *must* drink—he *must* drown his care: thought drives him mad—and from thought he must therefore fly. But whither can he fly? The rich and the well-to-do have their theatres and places of amusement: if a penny tea-garden or a penny theatre be opened in Lock's Fields, or in any other poor neighbourhood, the magistrates must put it down;—it is a source of demoralisation—it is a focus of thieves and prostitutes! But the swell-mob and flash women frequent the Haymarket Theatre—and the Lyceum—and the Surrey—and the Victoria—aye, and Covent-Garden and Drury Lane Theatres also. "Oh!" cries the magistrate; "*that* is very different!" Yes—every thing in this country is different when the wealthy or the well-dressed are concerned on one side, and the poor and the ragged on the other. Then, whither can this pauperised despairing man in Lock's Fields go to escape the bitterness of his reflections? To the public-house—or to throw himself into the canal:—those are the only alternatives!

Is it not dreadful to think that we have a sovereign and a royal family on whom the country lavishes money by hundreds of thousands,—whose merest whims cost sums that would feed and clothe from

year to year *all* the inhabitants of such a place Lock's Fields;—that we have also an hereditary aristocracy and innumerable slock and comfort dignitaries of the Church, who devour the fruit of the earth and throw the parings and the peels contemptuously to the poor;—in a word, that have an oligarchy feasting upon the fattened calf, flinging the offal to the patient, enduring, toil oppressed millions,—is it not dreadful, we ask think how much those millions do for Royal Aristocracy, Church, and Landed Interest, and little—how miserably little, Royalty, Aristocracy, Church, and Landed Interest do for *them* in turn?

But let us go back to Thomas Rainford and little boy, whom we left on their way to Lock's Fields—for it was to this district that the excellent man was leading his young charge.

And, as they went along, many were the words that Tom Rain uttered to cheer his art companion.

"Come, do n't cry, my dear little fellow," would say: "here is another cake—and when get home you shall have something nice for sup; Are you cold, Charley? Well, you shall soon warm yourself by the side of a good blazing fire. To-night you shall sleep in a soft bed; and to-morrow morning you shall have some new clothes. I going to take you where you will find a pretty little who will be as kind to you as the mamma you have just lost. Are you tired, Charley? Well, I take you up and carry you."

And Tom Rain lifted the poor child in his arms and kissed away the tears which ran down cheeks. The boy threw his little arms around neck of his kind protector, and said, "Oh! you as good to me as my dear papa was."

"And how long has your papa been dead, Charley?" asked Rainford, supposing that the child meant by his father the husband of the woman who had died that evening in Toby Bunce's house.

"Not very long—but I do n't know how long was the reply. "Oh! stay—I think I heard mamma say this morning that he died six months ago."

"And where did you live then, Charley?"

"At a cottage near a great town—Oh! I remember—Winchester."

"Winchester!" cried Rainford. "I know that part of the country well—or at least I ought to do so," he murmured to himself, with a profound sigh. "But what made you leave your cottage?"

"When papa was buried, mamma had no more money," replied the child; "and some naughty people came at last and took away all the things in the cottage and turned mamma and me out of doors. And then mamma cried so much—oh! so much; and we were very often hungry after that—and we sometimes had no bed to sleep in."

"Poor little fellow!" cried Rainford, hugging the child closer still to his breast. "What was your papa's name?"

"Watts—and my name is Charley Watts," said the boy.

At this moment Rainford stopped at one of the few decent-looking houses in Lock's Fields, and knocked at the door, which was immediately opened by a young and beautiful woman, who appeared over-joyed at his return.

"I have brought you a present in the shape of this poor little boy," said Rainford as he entered.

the house. "If you wish to please me, you will behave to him as kindly as I shall."

The young woman took Charley in her arms, and kissed him as a proof that Tom's request should be attended to; and Rainford, well pleased at that demonstration, closed the street-door behind him.

CHAPTER X.

A SCENE AT THE HOUSE OF SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT.

ON the following afternoon, shortly after four o'clock, three gentlemen sate, sipping their wine after an early dinner, in a magnificently furnished room in Jermyn Street.

The one who occupied the head of the table was a red-faced, stout, elderly gentleman, with hair of that blueish-black which denotes the use of an artificial dye, and with large bushy whiskers of a similar tint. He was dressed in a blue coat with brass buttons, white waistcoat, and black kerseymere trousers fitting very tight. A massive gold chain depended from his neck; and on his fingers he wore several rings of great value. In manner he was authoritative, even to rudeness: for, being immensely rich, he firmly believed that money constituted an aristocracy which had a perfect right to command. His pride was the more excessive too, as he had risen from nothing: that is, he had begun life as an errand boy in a linen-draper's shop, and had finished his mercantile career as a warehouseman in Wood Street, where he amassed a considerable fortune. He had filled the office of Sheriff, but had vainly endeavoured to procure an aldermanic gown; and, having failed to persuade the livery-men of Portsoken Ward that he was the very best person they could possibly choose to represent them in the superior City Court, he had ever since affected to rejoice at his rejection, and to look upon all City men and City matters with contempt. In reality, too, he was dreadfully mortified at the fact of his low origin; but, with that clumsy duplicity which vulgar minds often employ in such cases, he pretended to make a boast of his humble beginning, and used the subject as a means of constantly reminding his friends and acquaintances of what he had done for himself. While he held the Shrievalty, it fell to his lot to present an address to the Prince Regent; and on that occasion he received the honour of knighthood. Such was Sir Christopher Blunt.

The gentleman who sate at the bottom of the table was Mr. Frank Curtis, Sir Christopher's nephew. He was a tall, spare, thin, sickly-looking young man, of three-and-twenty; with long, straight, black hair, large staring dark eyes, very bad teeth, and a disagreeable, impudent, pert expression of countenance. He was an orphan, and totally dependent upon his uncle, who had brought him up to no business, inasmuch as he had looked upon the young man as his heir. Sir Christopher, however, having reached his fiftieth year without ever thinking of matrimony, was suddenly smitten with Miss Julia Mordaunt, Lady Hatfield's friend; and as Miss Mordaunt belonged to a very ancient though a greatly impoverished family, Sir Christopher thought that he should gain his darling wish—namely, obtain standing and consideration in the fashionable world—by conducting that lady to the

hymeneal altar. This ardent desire he nevertheless kept to himself as much as possible; his first object being to get rid of his nephew in some way or another. For Mr. Frank Curtis had acquired considerable influence over his uncle; and the latter was too much of a moral coward to be able to tell his nephew boldly and frankly that he proposed "to change his condition." The passion which Frank had conceived for Miss Adelaïs Torrens seemed to furnish the knight with an opportunity to settle the young man, and thus throw off an influence which impeded his own matrimonial designs: hence the readiness of Sir Christopher to lend Mr. Torrens five thousand pounds as an inducement for that gentleman to compel his portionless daughter to accept Mr. Frank Curtis for a husband. We must add, that Frank had passed six months on the continent; and this brief sojourn in France had supplied the staple commodity of his entire conversational powers. Nor must we forget to observe that he was as arrogant a boaster as he was in reality a coward; and that he was so afflicted with the vice of mendaciousness, he could scarcely speak the truth by accident.

The third gentleman present in Sir Christopher's splendid dining-room, was Mr. Howard, the knight's solicitor. We need not say more relative to this individual than that he was about five-and-forty years old, enjoyed an excellent practice, was considered a fine-looking man by the ladies, and was noted for his devotion to the Turf.

The table was spread with a choice dessert and an assortment of the most exquisite wines, to which the three gentlemen appeared to be doing ample justice. Sir Christopher drank copiously, because he felt particularly well pleased at the prospect of getting rid of his nephew, for whom and the intended bride he had taken and furnished a beautiful house at Clapham: Frank had frequent recurrence to the bottle, because he felt nervous and anxious;—and the lawyer stuck fast to the Burgundy, because he liked it.

"Take care, Frank, how you fill your glass too often," said Mr. Howard; "or the young ladies will not find you very agreeable presently."

"Do n't mind me, old fellow," exclaimed Curtis: "I can drink you under the table any day. Why, when I was in Paris I used to think nothing of a bottle of brandy with my breakfast. I recollect once betting thirty napoleons with an old Major of grenadiers at Boulogne—"

"A drum-major, I suppose, Frank," said the lawyer with a smile.

"Frank could not so far forget himself as to associate with a *drum-major*," observed Sir Christopher, in a voice like that of a man who goes about with a Punch and Judy show. "Thanks to my honest exertions, I have placed myself—and, in placing myself, have placed *him*—in a position which you will permit me to call brilliant. You know I make no secret of what I *was*. I rose from nothing—and I'm proud of it. And if his gracious Majesty, in acknowledgment of my humble merits, condescended to bestow upon me the honour of knighthood—"

"Oh! blow that old story, uncle!" cried the dutiful nephew. "I was telling you how I laid fifty napoleons with a Colonel of French engineers that I would drink two bottles of champagne to every one of his share—"

"What time will the horses be round at the door?" demanded Howard of the knight; for the lawyer was anxious to escape the menaced tale.

"At six o'clock precise," answered Sir Christopher. "I am always punctual. I learnt punctuality when I was a lad; and I firmly believe it helped to make me what I am. When I look around and see how I am now situated, and think of what I was—"

"Do let me tell you this story," interrupted Frank, re-filling his glass: "it is a capital one, I can assure you. Well, so the French Major-General and me, we sate down at table, and spread out the hundred and fifty napoleons that we had bet. Then we rang the bell, and ordered three bottles of Burgundy to begin with—two for me, and one for him."

"Burgundy was it?" said the lawyer, sipping his wine.

"No—claret, and I told you so," exclaimed Curtis. "But how provoking you are! Well, so the Lieutenant-General and me, we began to drink the champagne just as if it was so much water—both of us eyeing the two hundred napoleons—"

"Half-past four," said Mr. Howard, looking at his watch, and with difficulty suppressing a yawn.

"For I felt sure of winning—and so did he," continued Frank Curtis. "Well, I soon disposed of my two bottles of Port, and the General drank his one like a Trojan. To work we went again—two more for me, and another for him. Then I proposed cigars, because I knew that I could stand smoking better than him. He agreed; and we puffed away like two factory-chimnies. At last he showed signs of distress—"

"Ah! got quite groggy, like a prize-fighter at the fortieth round," observed Mr. Howard.

"Exactly," said Frank: "and so by the time I had finished my sixth bottle of Sherry, and the Field-Marshal had only got half-way through his third, he was completely sewn up. I pocketed the five hundred napoleons, as a matter of course—rang the bell to desire the waiter to take the Admiral off to bed—and then went and did the amiable at an evening party, where no one could tell that I had ever been drinking at all."

"And so you think that a very pleasant adventure, Master Frank?" said Sir Christopher. "Now, for my part, I leave guzzling and hard-drinking to those vulgar citizens the other side of Temple Bar. Do you know, Howard, that I really believe it was the most fortunate day of my life when I lost the election for Portsoken? If I had become an Alderman—"

"You would have looked the Alderman to perfection, Sir Christopher," observed the lawyer.

"Well—well—I might have been dignified on the bench—or I might not," said the knight complacently: "that is a mere matter of opinion—although I have been told by a friend who is not accustomed to flatter, that I have more sense—sound sense, I mean—in my little finger, than all the Aldermen and Common Councilmen put together. But it was fortunate for me—very fortunate—that I escaped from the vulgar contact of those citizens."

At this moment a servant entered the room, to announce that a gentleman desired to speak to Sir Christopher Blunt.

"Show him up—show him up," cried the knight. "I have no secrets that my nephew and solicitor may not hear."

The domestic retired; and in a few minutes he re-appeared, ushering in Rainford by the name of Captain Sparks.

Tom was dressed in his usual sporting garb, over which he wore a white top-coat—an article of attire much in vogue in those days amongst gentlemen who were accustomed to ride much on horseback. As he walked, his silver spurs clinked on the heels of his well-polished boots; and in his right hand he carried a whip.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen, for this intrusion," said Tom, as he entered the room; "but having heard from my very particular friend Mr. Torrens of the little affair that is to take place to-morrow morning—"

"Pray sit down, Captain Sparks," interrupted Sir Christopher. "Any friend of Mr. Torrens is welcome in this house. I do not, however, remember that he has mentioned your name in my hearing."

"Very likely not," said Rainford, drawing a chair close to the table. "The fact is I have been travelling in the north, for my amusement, during the last two years; and I only returned to town this morning. The first thing I did was to run down and see my dear friend Torrens: and you may fancy how surprised and pleased I was to learn what an excellent match his eldest daughter was about to make."

"There is the bridegroom, Captain Sparks," said the knight, pompously waving his hand towards his nephew.

"Very happy to form your acquaintance, Mr. Curtis," exclaimed Tom, with a polite bow.

"Equally delighted to know you, Captain," replied the nephew. "Here's a clean glass—and there's the bottle. Help yourself."

"With much pleasure," said Tom, suiting the action to the word. "But I was about to tell you that Mr. Torrens did me the honour to invite me to the wedding; and as I was obliged to come back to town to have my portmanteau sent down to the Cottage, I have made bold to intrude myself upon you, gentlemen, with the view of joining your party—that is, if you will permit me."

"We shall be quite charmed, Captain Sparks," answered Sir Christopher Blunt. "I need not inquire if you proceed to the Cottage on horseback!"

"Oh! yes—none of your coaches or carriages for me," returned Tom. "I have put up my horse at the stables close by in York Street; for my groom was taken ill a couple of hours ago—"

"Our horses are also there," interrupted Sir Christopher; "and one of my grooms," he added ostentatiously, "shall bring round yours when he fetches ours. But I beg pardon for my rudeness, Captain Sparks:—this gentleman is Mr. Howard—my solicitor."

Rainford and the lawyer bowed to each other; the wine went round; and Tom chuckled inwardly at the success of his stratagem to obtain access to the knight.

"You see, Captain Sparks," said Sir Christopher in a dictatorial tone, "this projected alliance has met with some little opposition on the part of the young lady herself."

"So Torrens told me this afternoon," observed Tom coolly. "But the qualifications of your nephew, Sir Christopher, are doubtless such—"

"I flatter myself," exclaimed Curtis, pleased with

this compliment, "that I have the knack of making myself agreeable to the women when I choose. Why, the day that I left Paris, a French Marchioness took poison, and a Countess went melancholy mad—both without any apparent cause: but I knew damned well what was the reason, though."

"You're a sad fellow, Frank," said the lawyer.

"Now why should you assert that?" cried the young man, affecting to be annoyed by the remark. "Did I tell you that any thing particular occurred between me and those ladies? Suppose the Duchess *did* have a little partiality for me—and suppose the Baroness *was* the least thing jealous—eh? What then?"

"Ah! what then, indeed?" said Tom Rain. "Mr. Curtis is too much a man of honour to betray those fair ones who were weak enough to be beguiled by his soft nonsense."

"Egad! you're right," exclaimed Frank, in whose good opinion the self-styled Captain was rapidly rising. "I would not give a fig for a fellow that boasts of his conquests. But if any one *might* boast on that subject, I think it is your humble servant. What do you say, Howard? Haven't I told you some queer tales at times?"

"You have indeed," answered the lawyer drily.

"Talking of boasting, Captain Sparks," said the knight, who now found means to thrust in a word, "it is *my* opinion that the only legitimate boast is that which a man can make of having risen from nothing. Now I never attempt to conceal my origin: on the contrary, I glory in it. Why, sir, I began life without a shilling, and without a friend: and now look at me!"

Tom Rain did look at Sir Christopher, as he was requested to do; and it struck our friend that there was nothing very particular to admire in the worthy knight after all.

"You see me, Captain Sparks?" continued Sir Christopher, in an authoritative tone. "Well, sir—such as I am now, I made myself."

"And the more to your credit," said Tom, who could not help thinking that if the knight's words were to be taken literally, it was a great pity that he had not made himself a trifle handsomer while he was about it.

"Come, Howard, pass the bottle, old fellow," cried Frank Curtis, who always got disgustingly familiar when he was in his cups—which was so often that he was seldom out of them: and, as is the case with all persons who boast of the quantity they can drink, it did not require much to upset him. "Remember," he added, "we have rather a lonely road to travel part of the way—"

"Why—you surely cannot be afraid of robbers, Mr. Curtis?" exclaimed Tom, bursting out into a merry laugh.

"I afraid!" ejaculated the young man; "not I! I should think not, indeed! Why, when I was travelling from Abbeville to Paris in the mail, we were stopped by three highwaymen in the middle of the night. The government-courier and myself tackled them in a moment: we were the only persons in

quietly. "A powerful and courageous young gentleman like you must be a match for any five highwaymen in the world."

"Come, come now," exclaimed Frank: "I don't say *that* exactly. But I will assert this much—that I have no more fears of a robber than I should have of a child's stopping me on the highway."

"In that case," observed Mr. Howard, throwing a pocket-book across the table towards Curtis, "you had better take charge of the money that's to be paid over to Mr. Torrens presently."

"Oh! as for *that*—But, never mind," cried Frank, not appearing particularly to relish the office of treasurer thus forced upon him, yet unable to decline the trust after his magniloquent vaunting: "I'll keep the two thousand safe enough, depend upon it."

Sir Christopher looked at his watch; and, finding that the hour for departure was approaching, he rang the bell to order the horses.

Precisely as the clock struck six, the party, attended by John Jeffreys, with whom Rain had found an opportunity to exchange a word or two, quitted Jermyn Street, and rode towards Westminster Budge.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO THOUSAND POUNDS.—TORRENS COTTAGE.

THE evening was bright, clear, and frosty; and the stars shone resplendently on the wide arch of heaven.

Well wrapped up in their great coats, the party of horsemen pursued their way; and at about seven o'clock they turned from the main-road near Streatham Common, into a bye-lane leading towards Torrens Cottage, thus leaving Streatham itself on their right hand.

Sir Christopher and the lawyer rode about a hundred yards in advance, Tom Rain and Frank Curtis having stopped at a public-house to procure cigars. Jeffreys, the groom, was about fifty yards in the rear.

"You must come and see us, Captain Sparks, after the honeymoon," said Curtis. "We shall be delighted to make you welcome."

"I shall avail myself of your kind offer," returned Tom.

"And you and me will try who can stand his bottle best," continued the young man. "But what atrocious cigars these are! I remember when I was in Paris, I was very intimate with a certain foreign Prince who was staying there—and I don't mind hinting to you that I was a great favourite with the Princess too. She was a charming woman—a very charming woman. I never saw such eyes in my life! Well, the Prince was a great smoker; and he one day gave me a box of his prime cigars—such cigars! I never smoked such beauties before or since. Poor fellow! he was killed in a duel

to have received from the Marchioness; and the Marquis heard of it. He instantly sent for me, and desired me to carry the grenadier-officer a message. I did so; and the hostile encounter took place in Boulogne-wood. The hussar-officer pinked the Count slap through in no time; for it appeared that he was the best swordsman in all France. Well, of course I was desperately savage to see my poor friend the Duke knocked off the hooks in that unceremonious way; and I determined to avenge him. So I challenged the light-infantry officer on the spot; and we fought for six hours without either of us getting a scratch or yielding a foot of ground. Our swords were worn as thin as skewers——"

"I have no doubt of it," said Tom coolly. "It must have been a splendid sight."

"It was indeed," returned Frank. "But at last I obtained a trifling advantage. The artillery-officer had a cold; and I watched him anxiously to catch him off his guard when he sneezed. Egad! that was a glorious idea of mine; and it succeeded too;—for after nine hours' hard fighting, I ran him through just as a cook spits a joint. You cannot imagine what a reputation that affair gave me in Paris. Every one was desirous to see the young Englishman who had killed the best swordsman in France. And, after all, without boasting, it was a feat to be proud of."

"Decidedly so," observed Tom. "But you are too brave a man, Mr. Curtis, to indulge in idle boasts."

"Of course," cried Frank. "Fellows like you and me, Captain, who know what swords and pistols mean, are the last to brag of their exploits."

"Do you carry pistols with you, Mr. Curtis?" asked Tom.

"Generally—generally," was the reply. "But I did not think it necessary to take them with me this evening."

"Well, I did," said Rainford. "And here is one," he added, producing the weapon from the pocket of his white great-coat.

"Pray do n't hold it near me, Captain!" cried Frank, reining in his horse with a trepidation most remarkable on the part of a gentleman who had performed such gallant deeds in resisting highwaymen and as a duellist.

"Yes—but I shall not only hold it near you," said Tom: "I shall also fire it—unless you instantly, and without noise, hand me over that pocket-book which you have about you."

"Captain Sparks!" ejaculated the trembling young man: "this passes a joke. Come, now——"

"I never was more serious in my life," interrupted Rainford sharply. "Give me the pocket-book; or——"

And the sharp click of the pistol, as Tom cocked it, sounded like a death-warrant upon the cowardly boaster's ears. In fact, he sat paralysed—motionless—speechless upon his horse, at a loss how to act.

"Come, be quick!" cried Rain, seizing him by the collar of his coat: "I have no time for any of your nonsense."

"You—you—can't—mean——" stammered the young man, "that—you——"

"Yes—I mean that I am a highwayman, if you like to call me so," interrupted Tom impatiently: "and so give me the pocket-book."

Curtis obeyed with trembling hand and sinking heart.

"And now" said Tom, as the sounds of the

trampling of a horse announced that the groom was approaching, "one word of caution! You are going to drag a young lady into a match most unwelcome to her. Beware how you accomplish her unhappiness by forcing her to accept as a husband such a contemptible boaster and arrant liar as you are: beware, I say—or you will see more than you like of Captain Sparks."

Having thus spoken, Rainford turned his horse round, and galloped away with lightning-speed.

John Jeffreys, whom he passed in the lane, did not of course attempt to molest him.

But when the groom overtook Frank Curtis, he said, "Any thing the matter, sir? I saw the Captain gallop back again like an arrow."

"Captain!" ejaculated the young man: "he is a robber—a thief—a gallows-bird!"

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Jeffreys, affecting profound astonishment.

"He has plundered me of two thousand pounds, John," cried Frank, in so lamentable a tone that the groom could hardly suppress a violent indication to laugh.

"Robbed you, sir!" exclaimed Jeffreys. "You're joking, sir: no two men in England could rob you."

"We had a desperate tussle for it, John," replied Curtis; "but the villain knocked me off my horse with the butt-end of his pistol. It was a cowardly blow—and I was not prepared for it."

"Most likely not, sir," said the groom drily. "But I thought he must have used some underhand means, because I know what sort of a customer you must be."

"You're right enough there, my man," returned Curtis. "I had got the better of him at one time; and although he has gone off with the two thousand pounds, he has carried away with him such a drubbing that he won't forget in a hurry. But let us ride after my uncle and Mr. Howard—because he might come back," added Frank, casting a terrified glance behind him.

The young gentleman and the servant put spurs to their horses, and in a quarter of an hour overtook the knight and the lawyer, to whom Frank related in his own style the adventure which had just occurred.

"And you mean to say that you surrendered the pocket-book—that you gave up two thousand pounds?" exclaimed Sir Christopher, in a passion.

"What could I do?" said Frank. "The scoundrel took the money from me by main force."

"He was stronger than the five highwaymen in France," observed the lawyer quietly.

"Stronger! I believe you," cried Curtis. "And then he was armed to the very teeth. Why, when he threw open his green cut-away coat, I could see by the starlight a belt stuck round with pistols, daggers, and sharp knives. Or else do you think for a moment that he could have mastered me?"

"Well, the mischief is done," said the knight in a doleful tone; "and a pretty figure we shall cut at the Torrens's. I dare swear that the rascal is no more an acquaintance of the family than he is of the King of England."

"It is to be hoped he is not," observed Mr. Howard, who was mightily pleased to think that he had handed over the money into Frank's keeping previously to setting out:—"It is to be hoped nevertheless your nephew, Sir Christopher, would be marrying into a nice family."

"Really, Mr. Howard, this is no time for jesting," exclaimed the knight. "But why did n't you try and stop the villain, John?"

"I, sir!" said the groom. "How should I know that he had committed a robbery when he galloped past me? Besides, if he is such a terrible chap as Mr. Frank represents him, it would have been useless for me to try my hand with him."

"Certainly! John is quite right," observed Mr. Curtis. "If I could do nothing with him, I'm sure no one else could. He is as strong as a lion; and, egad! how he did swear! It was quite horrible to hear him. But what shall we do?"

"Do, indeed!" ejaculated Sir Christopher. "We shall look like so many fools when we arrive at the Cottage."

"But Mr. Torrens will take your cheque, Sir Christopher," remarked the lawyer.

"True. We can manage it in that way," said the knight. "Still the cash would have appeared more business-like on such an occasion. But it is growing late: let us push on."

"Yes—let us push on," echoed Frank, casting troubled glances around, and trembling lest the highwayman should take it into his head to return and rob the remainder of the party.

In twenty minutes they reached Torrens Cottage, the inmates of which we must pause to describe.

Mr. Torrens was a widower, and had numbered about five-and-fifty years. He was a tall, thin, dry-looking man, with a very sallow complexion, a cold grey eye, and a stern expression of countenance. After having long held a situation in a Government office, he retired with a pension; and just at the same period a relation died, leaving him a few thousand pounds. With this sum he bought a beautiful little villa, which he denominated Torrens Cottage, and the leasehold of some land at Norwood, where he set busily to work to build a row of houses to be called Torrens Terrace. He had long made architecture an amateur-study during his leisure hours; and the moment he was enabled to retire from his situation in the Ordnance Office, and became possessed of capital, he resolved to put his numerous architectural theories into practice. But, as it frequently happens in such matters, he grew embarrassed; and the works were menaced with stoppage for want of funds, when Mr. Curtis became enamoured of his eldest daughter, whom he met at the house of some of Mr. Torrens's relations in London. The bargain, already described, was soon after struck between Sir Christopher Blunt and Mr. Torrens, who did not hesitate to sacrifice his daughter's happiness to his own pecuniary interests. Unfortunately, too, for the young lady, he did not regard the contemplated union in the light of a sacrifice at all; inasmuch as he naturally looked upon Frank Curtis as Sir Christopher's heir, not dreaming that the worthy knight entertained the remotest idea of perpetrating matrimony. Mr. Torrens therefore considered that his daughter Adela was about to form a most eligible connexion; and, although he was aware that her affections were engaged in another quarter, he acted upon the belief that parents must know best how to ensure their children's happiness.

His two daughters, Adela and Rosamond, were both charming girls, of the respective ages of eighteen and sixteen. Their dark clustering locks, their deep hazel eyes lustrous with liquid light, and their

symmetrical figures filled all beholders with admiration. Adela was now pale, melancholy, and drooping; for she loathed the alliance that was in contemplation for her—loathed it, not only because her heart was another's, but also because the manners, conversation, and personal appearance of Frank Curtis were revolting in her estimation. Rosamond possessed a rich complexion, in which glowed all the innate feelings of her soul, animating and imparting to every feature of her beautiful face an additional charm. She was naturally the confidant of her sister, whose hard fate she deeply deplored; and many were the plans which the amiable girls had devised and discussed, with a view to overcome their father's cruel pertinacity in insisting on the sacrifice of Adela to Frank Curtis. But each and all of those projects had either failed, or involved proceedings repugnant to their pure and artless minds. For instance, they had thought of abandoning the paternal roof, and endeavouring to seek their livelihood by needlework in some safe retirement: then Adela would not permit Rosamond to dare the misfortunes of the world by flying from a home which she—the younger sister—had at least no personal motive to desert; and Rosamond on her side would not allow Adela to set out alone. Again, a clandestine marriage between Adela and her lover was often debated: the young man urged it himself;—but the daughters dreaded the father's eternal anger; and thus this project had been abandoned also. To be brief, the dreaded moment was now at hand; and the seal of misery was about to be set on the roll of the elder maiden's destinies.

And who was the lover of Adela? A handsome, generous-hearted, honourable young man, occupying a situation in the very Government office where Mr. Torrens had himself served for many years. But, although Clarence Villiers was so far provided for, and had every prospect of rising rapidly on account of his steady habits and assiduous attention to his employment, yet he was at present only a poor clerk with ninety pounds a-year; and he had no capital. Mr. Torrens, as we have seen, required capital; and thus Frank Curtis was preferred to Clarence Villiers.

We cannot quit this description without alluding to the ardent affection which existed between the sisters. Having lost their mother in their childhood, and their father being almost constantly from home throughout the day, they were naturally thrown entirely upon each other for companionship. An illimitable confidence sprang up between them—a confidence more intimate far than even that which usually subsists between sisters; because this confidence on the part of Adela and Rosamond extended to a mutual outpouring of their most trivial as well as of their most important thoughts, hopes, or aspirations. Thus, the reader will cease to be astonished that, when Adela, in the anguish of her heart, had contemplated flight from the paternal roof as the only alternative save a hateful marriage, Rosamond insisted upon accompanying her. Much as they loved and revered their father, they were both prepared to sacrifice even filial affection and filial duty for each other's sake. This feeling may be looked upon as one involving a grievous fault on their side: it was not, however, the less firmly rooted in their minds,—for they were all and all to each other!



CHAPTER XII.

ADELAIS AND ROSAMOND.

SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT, Mr. Howard, and Frank Curtis were soon seated in Mr. Torrens' comfortable parlour, the walls of which were adorned with an infinite variety of architectural plans set in carved oaken frames.

A cheerful fire blazed in the grate; wine was placed upon the table; and the travellers were speedily as much at their ease as they could wish, or as their host could render them.

The young ladies were in another apartment, Mr. Torrens having desired them to remain in the drawing-room while the commercial part of the projected matrimonial arrangement was being settled in the parlour.

When the usual complimentary phrases had been exchanged, and Sir Christopher had observed that the weather was remarkably fine but very cold—a proposition to which Mr. Torrens entirely assented—for somehow or another people never do contradict each other when commenting on that subject;

—when, also, a glass or two of wine had been imbibed by each, the knight inquired whether Mr. Torrens happened to be acquainted with a Captain Sparks?

The answer was a negative.

Sir Christopher then began to relate the adventure of the evening; and, although he was constantly interrupted by his nephew, who was anxious to interpolate in the narrative certain saving clauses respecting his own valour towards the highwayman, the worthy knight nevertheless succeeded at length in bringing the tale to an end.

"It is clear," said Mr. Torrens, "that you were first duped and then robbed by an infamous scoundrel. But have you any notion how he could have learnt enough of the pending arrangements to be enabled to talk so familiarly with regard to them when he first introduced himself to you?"

"That puzzles me, my dear sir," returned Sir Christopher.

"And it is likely to continue to puzzle you, uncle," observed Frank: "for the whole business defies conjecture. I remember, when I was in France—"

"The villain evidently knew that you would leave

town with a considerable sum of money in your possession," said Torrens; "and his aim was to get it. He did get it too."

"But not without a deuced good thrashing into the bargain," cried Frank; "and that's some consolation."

"I dare say Captain Sparks, as he calls himself, would gladly be thrashed every hour in the day on the same terms," observed the lawyer. "But I think that when our little business is concluded, I should do well to return to London and give information at Bow Street as speedily as possible."

"By no means," exclaimed Sir Christopher. "We must keep the tale to ourselves. If it got into the newspapers, with all the particulars, it would only make us look ridiculous. We might punish the man; but we should never get back the money. No—no: let the matter drop—for all our sakes. Thank heaven," continued the knight, assuming a slower and more pensive tone, "the loss is paltry—very paltry in my estimation. I shall not miss the amount, I can assure you."

"But you have no objection to my giving the scoundrel another good drubbing, uncle, the first time I meet him again?" inquired Frank Curtis, with great apparent earnestness.

"Oh! there can be no objection to that—if the Captain will allow you so to operate on him," said the lawyer drily.

"Allow me, indeed! I should like to know how he could prevent it," exclaimed Frank, affecting deep indignation at the remark. "You should have seen the struggle we had!"

"Very likely: but I noticed your great-coat when we came in just now—and it was not soiled," said Howard.

"Of course not: I had him down all the time."

"Then it was a great pity you did not keep him there."

"Come—come—enough of this fencing," cried Sir Christopher. "Produce the deeds, Mr. Howard: my friend Torrens will take my cheque for the two thousand."

"Oh! certainly," replied the venal father.

"And to-morrow, let us hope that I shall have to give you another for three thousand more," added Sir Christopher. "Thank heaven! my cheque is as good as a Bank-note. But it was n't twenty years ago, though. Times have altered since then. And yet, as my friend Howard knows, I am proud of my humble origin."

"Yes—yes, uncle," exclaimed Frank: "we all know that perfectly. But let's to business, and then join the young ladies. I shall make them laugh with the story of the highwayman. It's the first time in my life I was ever conquered—ever overcome: and now it has n't been by fair means. I remember once, when I was at Montreuil, three French peasants had some of their nonsense with me; but I just—"

"Here are the documents, gentlemen," said Mr. Howard. "Frank shall conclude his story presently."

The agreements for the loan of the five thousand pounds were then read over; Mr. Torrens signed them; Sir Christopher Blunt wrote him a cheque for two thousand on account—the remaining three to be advanced only on condition that the proposed marriage took place;—and thus terminated the commercial part of the business.

The four gentlemen then proceeded to the drawing-room, where the two young ladies were seated.

Adelais was excessively pale; and when the odious Mr. Frank Curtis tripped smirkingly up to her, and, taking her fair hand, pressed it to his lips,—his breath, heated with wine and rendered offensive by the fumes of the cigar, steaming upon that delicate skin,—the maiden recoiled as if from something loathsome.

Her father, who observed her narrowly, cast upon her a rapid but ireful glance; and Adelais exerted herself strenuously to recover her composure.

Like a victim about to be sacrificed at the altar of some avenging god, she suffered her admirer to lead her to a seat in a remote part of the room; and placing himself by her side, Frank Curtis darted a triumphant look at Howard and Sir Christopher, as much as to say, "Just see how successfully I am going to play the amiable in this quarter."

Then, turning towards the lovely Adelais, whose large blue eyes were bent timidly down, and whose bosom palpitated with a variety of painful emotions, he observed, in what he considered to be a most endearing whisper, "Come, my sweet gal, cheer up: there's nothing to be frightened at in marriage. I know that I'm not quite a lady's man; but we shall get on better together by and bye. You see, my dear, I've always been used to manly sports or to seeking adventures where some glory was to be gained—such as knocking down watchmen, or fighting with highwaymen, or killing my man in a duel—and things of that kind. But I've no doubt it will be pleasant enough to be tied to your apron-string—if the string itself is n't too tight."

Adelais raised her fine blue eyes, turned them for a moment upon her admirer, and then again fixed them on the carpet, a profound sigh escaping her bosom at the same time:—but that glance, so involuntarily thrown towards her companion, was one of sudden curiosity—as if she were anxious to discover by the expression of his face whether he were indeed serious in the insufferable rhodomontade with which he sought to captivate her.

"There—that's right, my dear gal," said Curtis, mistaking the motive of that rapid look which was directed towards him; "do n't stand on any ceremony with me. In a few hours more we shall be husband and wife—"

Adelais shuddered visibly.

"Ah! I like this little modesty—it's all very proper on your part," continued the disgusting young man; "but it will soon wear off—naturally so."

The young lady now started indignantly—her countenance became crimson—and then large tears burst from her eyes. Curtis caught hold of her hand—but she withdrew it,—she literally snatched it away, as if from the jaws of a hideous reptile.

"You need n't think I'm going to eat you, Miss," said Frank in a surly tone. "But I forgot to tell you what an adventure I had just now with a couple of highwaymen," he continued in a milder voice. "You see, as me and my uncle and Howard were coming down the lane, I fell back a little—just to think of you, my dear, at leisure; when all of a sudden three chaps jumped over a bank, and pointed their blunderbusses at me. I did n't care a rap for that; but taking the riding-whip by the thin end, I knocked down three of them—one after the other—with the handle-part, you know, and had

just made up my mind to tackle the fourth, when my horse reared and threw me. For a moment I was insensible; and during that time the fifth scoundrel picked my pocket of the two thousand pounds which I may call the purchase-money of your own dear pretty little self."

"Sir!" exclaimed Adelaïs, aloud: "is it your intention to insult me?"

And, without waiting for a reply, but yielding to the tide of anguish and indignation which now impelled her, she rushed from the room.

Rosamond, who, while engaged in conversation with her father, Sir Christopher, and Mr. Howard at the other end of the room, had never ceased to watch her sister with the most lively interest, now immediately followed the almost heart-broken girl.

The moment the sisters had reached their bed-chamber, Adelaïs threw herself into Rosamond's arms, exclaiming, "I will never marry him—I will die sooner!"

"Has he offended you?" inquired Rosamond, affectionately embracing her disconsolate sister. "But I need not ask! Your changing countenance—your anxious looks—your convulsive movements—and then your tears, while he sate by you—"

"Oh! my very soul revolts against him!" cried Adelaïs, emphatically, the conflicts of agonising emotions painfully expressed on her countenance. "At first—when he approached me—it required all the exertions of which my fortitude was capable to subdue the feelings of aversion and disgust—of bitter woe and heart-felt misery—with which I was agitated;—but when his coarse language met my ears—Oh! Rosamond!" exclaimed the distracted maiden, "I must fly—I must avoid this dreadful fate—or my heart will break!"

At this moment Mr. Torrens slowly opened the door, and entered the room.

His countenance wore an expression which gave evidence that anger and compunction were maintaining a fierce struggle in his breast; but the former feeling was rapidly obtaining the ascendancy.

"Rash—disobedient girl," he exclaimed, fixing his stern cold eyes upon Adelaïs, who still clung to her younger sister, "what signifies this folly?"

"Spare me—spare me, my dearest father!" cried Adelaïs, suddenly tearing herself from Rosamond's embrace, and falling on her knees before her sire: "I cannot marry that horrible man!"

Mr. Torrens bit his lip almost till the blood came. "Listen to me, my dear father," continued the despairing girl, joining her hands together, while her cheeks were of marble whiteness, unanimated by a tinge of vital colouring—"I am your daughter, and must obey you; but if you persist in saying, '*Receive that man as your husband*,' it is the same as if you were to utter the word, '*Die*!' Oh! no—you cannot—you will not sacrifice me in this cruel, cruel manner! What have I done to offend you, that my unhappiness has become your aim? Dearest father—relent—I implore you: on my knees, I beseech you to save me ere it be too late!"

"Adelaïs," exclaimed Mr. Torrens, arming himself with that fatal sophistry which led him to believe that he was the only judge of what was fitting for his daughter's welfare and happiness,—"Adelaïs, rise—I command you!"

The miserable girl obeyed, but staggered with vacillating and irregular steps towards a chair, in

which she sank, the agony of her soul now expelling all power of reflection from its seat.

"I have gone too far to retreat—even if I were so disposed," continued Mr. Torrens. "Your happiness will be ensured by this union."

"Her happiness, father!" said Rosamond, reproachfully. "Oh! no—never, never!"

"Undutiful girl!" cried the venal parent: "do you league with your sister against me? I tell you that Adelaïs is about to become the wife of a young man who can give her an enviable position in society, and who at his uncle's death, will inherit an immense fortune. It is true that Mr. Curtis is somewhat rough in manner and incautious with his tongue; but perfection exists not in this world. To be brief, this marriage shall take place—it must—I dare not retract."

"Father, one word more," exclaimed Adelaïs, suddenly recovering her power of thought and speech—those powers which anguish had for a few minutes completely subdued: "you are about to sell your daughter to that man—he boasted to me that a few thousand pounds were the purchase-money—and hence my abrupt departure from the room."

"The phrase was wrong—ill-chosen—coarse," ejaculated Mr. Torrens, evidently smarting under this announcement: "but we must not judge of words themselves—we must only look to the motives of him who utters them. Mr. Curtis is incapable of insulting you—"

"Oh! you know not how abhorrent is the coarseness of his language!" cried Adelaïs, bursting into a torrent of tears.

"You provoke me beyond the limits of human patience!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens, stamping his foot with rage. "But no more of this. You know my will—prepare to obey it. I ask you not to return to the drawing-room to-night;—to-morrow morning let me hope that you will show yourself a dutiful daughter towards a father who is anxious only to ensure your prosperity."

Mr. Torrens then imprinted a cold kiss upon the fair foreheads of Adelaïs and Rosamond, and hastily quitted the apartment.

For some minutes after the door had closed behind them, the sisters sat gazing upon each other in the silence of painful and awful reflection.

Yet beautiful were they in their sorrow; for the unstudied attitudes and abandonment of limb which such a state of mind produces, gave additional grace to the just proportions of their forms, and imparted an expression of the most tender interest to the perfect composition of their features.

"Sister," at length said Rosamond, in a soft and mournful tone, as she approached Adelaïs, "what will you do?"

This question suddenly aroused the unhappy young lady to a sense of the urgent necessity of adopting some decisive measure.

Winding her arms around Rosamond's neck, she said, "I must fly from my father's house—I must abandon the paternal dwelling. O heaven! wherefore am I reduced to so fearful an alternative?"

"Speak not only of yourself, beloved Adelaïs," murmured Rosamond chidingly; "for you know that my fate, as well as my heart, is inseparably linked with thine."

"Oh! I doubt not the sincerity of your love for me, dearest sister," exclaimed Miss Torrens; "but I tremble at the idea of making you the companion of

my flight. Have we not read in books, dear girl, that London is a dreadful place—abounding in perils of all kinds, and concealing pit-falls beneath its most pleasant places? Oh! Rosamond, you are so young—so very young to quit your father's home and venture in that great city of danger and crime!"

"But with you as my companion, Adelaïs, I shall have courage to meet all these perils of which you speak," responded Rosamond, the tones of her voice becoming so gentle, so melting, and so persuasive, that never did she seem so dear—so very dear unto her sister as at this moment.

And now all hesitation was banished on the part of Adelaïs—it was settled—it was determined—Rosamond should become the companion of her flight!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ELOPEE.

LET us now return to our friend.

his way back to the no-phantasy case of Rainford, whom we left on of the street in London, after having so triumphantly met the vain-glorious Mr. Frank Curtis

"Oh! a thousand pounds. The highwayman,—for such indeed was the gay, generous-hearted, and brave Tom Rain,—scarcely condescended to bestow even a chuckle of satisfaction upon a victory so easily won—an exploit so readily accomplished.

He would have valued the prize far more, had it been obtained by means of hard blows and as the result of a desperate encounter; for the love of adventure was inherent in his disposition—and he had often courted danger in his life, for the exciting pleasure of freeing himself from its intricacy.

Having galloped his good steed to the beginning of the lane, he checked its celerity, and then proceeded at a moderate pace along the main road to the public-house where Curtis and himself had stopped to purchase their cigars about half an hour previously.

Riding up to the door of the little establishment, the highwayman leapt from his horse, and threw the reins to a dependant of the place who was conversing with the postillion of a chaise and pair that had stopped at the door.

When Rainford sauntered leisurely up to the bar, with his chimney-pot hat set rakishly on one side, his white coat comfortably buttoned up, and his riding-whip in his hand, the landlord instantly recollected him again, and observed, as he drew the liquor which the highwayman ordered, "Back to London, sir, to-night?"

"Yes," replied Tom carelessly: "I just escorted my friend as far as Torrens Cottage, and shall now get home again."

These words produced a visible emotion on the part of a tall, handsome, dark-haired young man, who was also standing at the bar. He was well protected by a great coat against the cold; and Tom therefore very naturally concluded that he was the traveller journeying in the post-chaise outside.

"Torrens Cottage!" cried the landlord. "Why, I do declare that's the very ticket. This gentleman here was just making inquiries whether I had any one that could take a note there in a confidential way."

The landlord blurted forth this announcement without heeding the significant coughs and "hems" of the tall young gentleman, who seemed greatly annoyed that the object of his call at the public-house should thus be published to the very first stranger who entered the place after him.

"You should keep a closer tongue in your head," said Tom Rain. "How do you know what harm might be done by your stupidity in letting out the gentleman's business in this kind of way? Fortunately, I am not the kind of fellow to do mischief; and in this case, it may be, that I can effect some good."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the tall young gentleman, his countenance suddenly exchanging the expression of annoyance which the landlord's garrulity had excited, for one indicative of hope and joy.

"Yes—I think so," said Tom. "But we must have a few words in private."

"Walk into the parlour, gentlemen," cried the landlord. "There's no one in that room at present."

Rainford and the tall stranger followed this suggestion; and when the door was closed behind them, the highwayman said, "If I am not very much mistaken, you must be the gentleman whom that lying braggart Frank Curtis is endeavouring to cut out?"

"My name is Clarence Villiers, sir," was the guarded reply.

"And you are the lover of Mr. Torrens's eldest daughter," continued Rainford. "Now do not waste valuable time by reflecting whether you shall make me your confidant, or not. I am disposed to serve you: tell me how I can do it."

"You will excuse me," said Villiers in a polite but somewhat reserved tone, "if I first request to be informed to whom I have the honour of speaking."

"Captain Sparks," was the immediate reply. "I happen to know old Sir Christopher and his precious nephew; and I rode down with them nearly as far as the cottage. But I did not accept their invitation to go in—for particular reasons of my own. You may, however, suppose that I am well acquainted with all the particulars of this infamous case. Miss Adelaïs Torrens loves Mr. Clarence Villiers and hates Mr. Frank Curtis; but Mr. Frank Curtis is the successful suitor with the mercenary father, because a certain five thousand pounds—"

"Enough, Captain Sparks!" ejaculated Villiers. "I see that you do indeed know all. And will you serve me in this strait?"

"I will—honour bright!" cried Tom. "There's my hand upon it. Now say what is to be done. It is already past eight o'clock," he added, after a hasty reference to a handsome gold watch which he drew from his fob.

"My object was to obtain an interview with Adelaïs in some way or another, and urge her to—"

"Speak plainly, my friend," cried Rain. "To elope with you. Well?—do you mean every thing that is honourable?"

"As God is my judge," said the young man solemnly. "I have frequently urged the dear girl to consent to a clandestine marriage with me; but the purity of her soul has ever revolted against a course which she considers to be marked with duplicity."

"Where would you convey her during the inter-

val that must necessarily elapse before you can marry her?" asked Rainford. "Because, as she is a minor, I suppose you could not obtain a special licence without her father's consent."

"I have an aunt in London devoted to my interests," answered Clarence; "and she would receive her with even maternal affection until I should acquire a legal right to protect her."

"So far, so good," observed Tom. "And yet a young lady eloping at night with a young man—remember, I am only speaking for the good of both of you."

"I had foreseen that difficulty also," said Villiers hastily. "The fact is, Adalais and her sister Rosamond are so linked together by the tenderest bonds of affection, that the one would not move a step unaccompanied by the other."

"The devil!" cried Rainford: "two ladies to carry off! That increases the embarrassment of the business. Now it is very clear that it is perfectly useless for us to send a messenger down with a note: it would be intercepted by the father. But if you will sit down and write what you choose, I will undertake to have it delivered to the young lady herself."

"You?" exclaimed Clarence joyfully.

"Yes: what I promise, I will perform," said Rainford. "Follow my directions—and all shall go well."

Clarence rang the bell, ordered writing materials, and in a few minutes completed a note to his beloved Adalais, which he read to his companion.

"Seal it," said Tom; "because it may pass through the hands of another person, after it leaves mine, and before it reaches Miss Torrens."

This suggestion was instantaneously complied with; and Rainford secured the letter about his person.

"Now," he continued, after a moment's reflection, "do you proceed with the chaise down the lane, and stop as near the cottage as is consistent with prudence. I shall retrace my way there at once. Fear nothing—but wait patiently at the place where you pull up, until I make my appearance."

Villiers promised to fulfil these instructions; and Rainford, having taken a temporary leave of him, remounted his horse and galloped towards Torrens Cottage.

The highwayman had his plan of proceeding ready digested by the time the white walls of the building, rendered particularly conspicuous in the starlight, met his view.

Alighting from his horse at a distance of about a hundred yards, he tied the animal to a tree, and then repaired towards the dwelling.

Having reconnoitred the premises, he speedily discovered the stable; and, to his infinite joy, a light streamed from one of the windows of that building.

Leaping over the palings which separated the kitchen-garden from the adjacent fields, Tom Rainford proceeded to the stable; and there, as he had anticipated, he found John Jeffreys, the groom, busily employed with his master's horses.

John was alone; and his surprise was great, when, upon being tapped on the shoulder, he turned round and beheld the highwayman.

"Silence!" said Tom in a whisper; "we have no time to lose in idle chatter. Here's five guineas for you; and you must get this note conveyed se-

cretly to Miss Torrens—Adalais, the eldest—you know."

"It shall be done, sir," replied Jeffreys. "I am already far in the good graces of the housemaid; the cook is old and deaf; and so there's no fear of my not being able to succeed."

"Good. And you will bring me the answer up the lane, where I shall wait for you."

"And how can you read it, when you get it?" demanded Jeffreys. "The night is not quite clear enough for that."

"The answer will be a verbal one—yes or no," replied Tom.

Jeffreys promised that no delay should occur on his part; and Rainford retraced his steps to the spot where he had left his horse.

Many novelists would here pause for the honest but somewhat tedious purpose of detailing all the reflections which passed through the mind of Rainford during the mortal half-hour that elapsed ere the sounds of footsteps upon the hard soil announced the approach of some person. But as we do not wish either to spin out our narrative with dry material, or to keep the reader in any unnecessary suspense, we will at once declare that at the expiration of the aforesaid thirty minutes John Jeffreys made his appearance at the appointed spot.

"What news?" demanded Tom impatiently.

"All right——"

"And the answer?"

"Is yes."

"That's well!" exclaimed Rainford. "You may now go back, John. All that I require of you is done."

"But I have something to say to you, sir," observed the servant. "Just now, Sir Christopher sent for me up into the parlour to give me some orders; and I heard Mr. Frank, who is uncommon far gone with brandy-and-water, making a boast to the lawyer-fellow that he'd walk all round the grounds to see that every thing is safe. It seems that the lawyer has been twitting him about his little business with you just now up the lane, you know; and so Mr. Frank is asumptious as possible. I only thought I'd better tell you of this—in case you've any business in hand that's likely to keep you about the place."

"I am very much obliged to you, John," said Rainford. "Here's another five guineas for you—and I shall not forget to speak to Old Death in your favour. But you had better get back as soon as you can, for fear you should be missed."

Jeffreys thanked the highwayman for the additional remuneration, and returned to the cottage.

It was now past nine o'clock, and Rainford murmured to himself, "I wonder how much longer they will be?"

His horse, which was a high-spirited animal, began to grow impatient of this long stoppage; and he himself shivered, in spite of the good great coat, with the nipping chill.

Another quarter of an hour elapsed; and, to the infinite joy of Tom Rain, he suddenly beheld two female figures, well muffled in shawls and furs, emerge from the obscurity at a short distance.

"All right, ladies," he said, in as loud a voice as he dared use consistently with prudence.

Adalais and Rosamond hurried towards him, as affrighted lambs to their shepherd; and yet, when

they were close to him, they seemed unable to utter a word.

"Fear not, ladies," exclaimed the highwayman. "I am the friend to whom Mr. Villiers alluded in his note."

"Save us, then, sir—save us," said Adelais, in an urgent and imploring tone; "for Mr. Curtis saw us leave the house: he was in the garden—"

At that moment the sounds of voices were heard in the direction of the cottage; and they were evidently approaching.

"Hasten up the lane, young ladies—hasten, for God's sake!" said Tom Rain. "Mr. Villiers is there with the post-chaise—and I will remain here to bar the way."

Adelais and Rosamond could not even give utterance to the thanks which their hearts longed to express: terror froze the words that started to their lips; and, not daring to glance behind them, they hurried up the lane.

Tom Rainford now mounted his horse, and took his station in the middle of the way; for several persons were rapidly approaching from the house.

In a few moments they were near enough to enable Rainford to catch what they said.

"The disobedient—self-willed girls!" exclaimed one, whom Tom was right in supposing to be Mr. Torrens.

"But was n't it fortunate that I twigged them?" said Curtis. "Egad!—"

"It will be much more fortunate if we overtake them," observed the lawyer.

"Bless me!—I'm out of breath," cried Sir Christopher. "I wish John would come on with the horses. Did you tell him, Frank?"

"To be sure I did. We cannot fail to overtake them. But, poor things! suppose that highwayman should fall in with them—and me not there to defend them!"

"I think it would be all the same—"

Howard was interrupted by a sudden ejaculation on the part of Mr. Torrens, who was a few paces in advance of the others, but who now abruptly came to a full stop.

"What is it?" demanded Curtis, shaking from head to foot, in spite of all the liquor he had imbibed during the day.

"Some ruffian on horseback—there—do n't you see?" exclaimed Mr. Torrens. "But I am not afraid of him: his presence here is in some way connected with my daughters."

And the incensed father rushed furiously towards the highwayman.

"Stand back!" cried Tom in his clear, stentorian voice; and this command was followed by the sharp clicking of the two pistols which he cocked.

"The robber!" exclaimed Frank Curtis, clinging to the coat-tails of Mr. Torrens, who had retreated a few paces at the ominous sound of the pistols. "At him, my dear sir—at him! I'm here to help you."

"Villain—give up the two thousand pounds, and we will let you go—on my honour as a knight!" ejaculated Sir Christopher, keeping as far remote as he deemed prudent from the sinister form which, wrapped in the white great coat, and seated composedly on the tall horse, seemed, amidst the obscurity of the night, to be a ghost disdaining to touch the earth.

"I am very much obliged to you for your kind-

ness, Sir Christopher," said Tom: "but I am not at all in fear of the necessity of purchasing my liberty at any price whatsoever. I however give you every one due warning, that the first who tries to pass this way—"

"Scoundrel! my daughters—where are they?" vociferated Mr. Torrens.

"That's it—give it him!" cried Frank Curtis.

"I'll be at him when you've done."

"Go on at once," cried Howard.

"And why are you standing idle there?"

"Because it is not my business to interfere."

"Well done, lawyer!" exclaimed Tom. "No fees can recompense you for an ounce of lead in the thigh: for if I do fire, I shall only try to lame—not kill."

"Mr. Curtis—Sir Christopher—will you not help me to arrest this villain who beards us to our very faces?" exclaimed Torrens, in a towering passion.

And again he rushed forward, while Frank Curtis beat a precipitate retreat behind his uncle.

"Stand back! or, by God, I'll fire!" thundered Rainford, suddenly spurring his horse in such a manner that the length of the animal was made to block up nearly the entire width of the bye-lane.

"You dare not murder me!" cried Torrens. "My daughters will escape!"—and he attempted to pass in front of the horse.

But by a skilful manœuvre, Rainford baffled him—arrested his progress—and kept him at bay, using all the time the most desperate menaces, which he did not, however, entertain the remotest idea of putting into execution.

"Mr. Curtis, sir—will you help me?" cried the infuriate father. "My daughters are escaping before your very eyes—you are losing your bride—"

"And you the rest of the money that was to have purchased her," said Rainford coolly. "Mercenary old man, you are rightly punished."

With these words, the highwayman suddenly wheeled his horse round, and disappeared in a moment.

He had succeeded in barring the way for upwards of ten minutes against the pursuers of the two fugitive ladies; and he calculated that in less than half that time they must have reached the post-chaise which Clarence Villiers had in readiness to receive them.

Jeffreys had purposely delayed getting the horses out; and even when he did appear with them, several minutes had elapsed since the highwayman had left the path free to those who thought fit to avail themselves of the services of the animals.

These were only two—Mr. Torrens and Jeffreys himself: the latter volunteering his aid for the purpose of misleading and embarrassing the father, rather than of assisting him.

Frank Curtis affected to be suddenly taken very unwell: Sir Christopher was really so; and the lawyer, although by no means a coward, did not see any utility in hazarding his life against such a desperate character as Captain Sparks (for by that denomination only did he know Tom Rain) appeared to be.

Thus, while the knight, his nephew, and the attorney retraced their steps to the cottage, leading back the horses which had been brought out for their use, Mr. Torrens and Jeffreys galloped away towards London.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY HATFIELD AND DR. LASCELLES—ESTHER DE MEDINA.

Two days after the incidents which we have just related, Dr. Lascelles received a message, at about noon, requesting him to repair immediately to the dwelling of Lady Hatfield, who was seriously indisposed.

He obeyed this summons with more than usual alacrity; for ever since Lord Ellingham had made him his confidant, the curiosity of the worthy doctor had been strangely piqued by the unaccountable fact that Lady Hatfield should reject the suit of a man whom she not only professed to love, but who was in every way worthy of her.

On his arrival at Lady Hatfield's residence, he was surprised to learn from Miss Mordaunt that his patient was too unwell to quit her couch; and when he was introduced into Georgiana's bed-chamber, he found her labouring under a strong nervous excitement.

In accordance with the sacred privilege of the physician, he was of course left alone with her ladyship; and, seating himself by the side of the bed, he questioned her in the usual manner.

Georgiana explained her sensations; but, although she alluded to nothing beyond those physical details which directly came within the province of the medical man, still Dr. Lascelles had no difficulty in perceiving that the *mind*, rather than the *body*, was affected.

"My dear Lady Hatfield," he said, in as gentle and mild a tone as he could possibly assume, "it is in the power of the physician to administer certain drugs which may produce temporary composure; and an opiate will encourage a good night's rest. But you will forgive me for observing that the condition in which I now find you, is scarcely one to which medical science will apply successfully—*unless* seconded by aid of a more refined and delicate nature."

"I do not comprehend you, doctor," exclaimed Georgiana, casting upon him a glance of mingled surprise and uneasiness.

"I mean, Lady Hatfield," resumed Lascelles, "that you are the prey to some secret grief—some source of vexation and annoyance, which medical skill cannot remove. The aid of a refined and delicate nature to which I refer, is such as can be afforded only by a sincere and confidential friend. Without for an instant seeking to draw you into any explanations, it is my duty to assure you that unless your mind be tranquillised, medicine will not successfully encounter this nervous irritability—this intense anxiety—this oppressive feeling of coming evil, without apparent cause—and this sleeplessness at night,—of all which you complain."

"I thank you most sincerely for this candid and frankness on your part, doctor," said Lady Hatfield, after a long pause, during which she appeared to reflect profoundly. "To deny that I have suffered much in mind during the last few days, were to practise a useless deception upon you. But I require no confidant—I need not the solace of friendship. To your medical skill I trust for, at all events, a partial restoration to health; and travelling—change of scene—the excitement of visiting Paris—or some such means of diversion, will effect the rest."

These last words were, however, accompanied with a deep sigh—as if upon the lady's soul were forced the sad conviction that happiness and herself must evermore remain strangers to each other.

"I should scarcely recommend travelling in the winter time, Lady Hatfield," observed Doctor Lascelles. "Surely our own city can afford that constant variety of recreation and those ever-changing scenes of amusement, which may produce a beneficial effect upon your spirits."

"I abhor the pleasures of the fashionable world, doctor," said Georgiana emphatically. "There is something so cold in the ostentation of that sphere—so chilling in its magnificence—so formal in its pursuits—so ceremonial, so thoroughly artificial in all its features and proceedings, that when in the crowded ball-room or the brilliant *sourcé*, I even feel more *alone* than when in the solitude of my own chamber."

"And yet, Lady Hatfield, throughout the extensive circle of your acquaintance," said the physician, "there must be at least a few endowed with intellectual qualifications adapted to render them agreeable. The most pleasant parties, composed of these select, might be given: your rank—your wealth—your own well-stored mind—and, pardon me, your beauty,—would ensure to you—"

"Oh! doctor," exclaimed Georgiana, "I can anticipate the arguments you are about to use; but, alas! my mind appears to be in that morbid state which discolours all objects with its own jaundiced thoughts. I speak thus candidly to you, doctor—because I am aware of your friendship for me—I know also that the admission I have now made will be regarded by you as a solemn secret—and perhaps your advice," she added, slowly and hesitatingly, "might prove beneficial to me. But, no—no," she exclaimed, her utterance suddenly assuming great rapidity, "it is useless to say more—advice cannot serve me!"

"There is scarcely a possible case of human vexation, grief, or annoyance, which cannot be relieved by the solace, or ameliorated by the counsel, of a friend," observed Doctor Lascelles, dwelling emphatically upon his words.

Georgiana played abstractedly with the long, luxuriant hair which streamed over her shoulders, and spread its shining masses on the white pillow; but at the same time the snowy night-dress rose and sank rapidly with the heavings of her bosom.

"Believe me, Lady Hatfield," continued Doctor Lascelles, after a short pause, during which he vainly awaited a reply to his former observation, "I am deeply grieved to find that one who so little deserves the sting of grief or the presence of misfortune, should suffer from either the sharpness of the first, or the menaces of the latter. But is it not possible, my dear lady,—and now, forgive me if I avail myself of the privilege of a physician to ask this question,—is it not possible, I say, that you have conjured up phantoms which have no substantial existence? Remember that there are certain conditions of the mind, when the imagination becomes a prey to the wildest delusions—"

"Doctor, I am no monomaniac," said Lady Hatfield abruptly. "But justly, indeed—oh! most justly and truly did you ere now assert that I little deserve the sting of grief! If through any crime—any weakness—any frailty on my part, I had

merited the sore displeasure of heaven—at that time.”

She checked herself abruptly, and burst into a flood of tears; and for a few moments her countenance appeared to be the sad index of a breaking heart.

“Doctor,” she observed at length, “pardon this manifestation of weakness on my part; but my spirits are so depressed—my mind feels so truly wretched, that I cannot control these tears. Think no more of what we have been saying: I wish that we had not said so much! Leave me a prescription, and visit me again in the course of the day.”

Lascalles wrote out a prescription, and then took his departure, wondering more than ever what secret cause of grief was nourished in the bosom of Lady Hatfield.

That this secret grief was the motive which had induced or compelled her to refuse the hand of Lord Ellingham, he could not doubt:—that it arose from no *crime*—*weakness*—nor *frailty* on her part, he felt assured; inasmuch as her own words, uttered in a paroxysm of mental anguish and not in a calm moment when deception might be her aim, proved that fact;—and that it was associated with any physical ailment, he could hardly believe. Because, if she were the prey to an insidious disease, no feeling of shame—no false delicacy could possibly force a woman of her good sense and naturally powerful mind to keep such a fact from her physician. What, then, could be that secret and profoundly-rooted cause of grief? Was it monomania of some novel or very rare kind? The curiosity of the man of science was keenly whetted: he already began to suspect that he was destined to discover some new phase in the constitution of the human mind; and he resolved to adopt all the means within his reach to solve the mystery.

This curiosity on his part was by no means of a common, vulgar, or base nature. Considering the profession and researchful disposition of the man, it was a legitimate and entirely venial sentiment. It was not that curiosity which loves to feed itself upon the materials of scandal. It was purely in connexion with the thirst of knowledge and the passion for discovery which ever animated him in that sphere of science to which he was so enthusiastically devoted.

The doctor was proceeding homewards, when he encountered Lord Ellingham. The Earl was walking by the side of an elderly gentleman, on whose arm hung a tall and graceful young lady; but the physician did not immediately catch a glimpse of her countenance, as it was turned towards Lord Ellingham, who was speaking at the moment.

The nobleman shook Lascalles warmly by the hand, and immediately introduced his companions by the names of Mr. and Miss de Medina.

The doctor bowed, and then cast a glance at the countenance of the young lady: but he started as if with a sudden pang,—for in the beautiful Jewess who now stood before him, he beheld—apparently past all possibility of error—the same female who a few days previously had attempted self-destruction in South-Moulton Street.

But, almost simultaneously with this unexpected conviction, the solemn promise which he had made to Tom Rainford (whom he only knew on that occasion by the denomination of Jameson) flashed to the mind of Doctor Lascalles; and, instantly com-

posing himself, he uttered some observation of a general nature.

“I am glad we have thus met, doctor,” said Lord Ellingham, who had not noticed his sudden, but evanescent excitement; “for my friend Mr. de Medina is a comparative stranger in London, and it is as well,” added the nobleman, with a smile, “that he should become acquainted with the leading physician of the day.”

“I believe that no one enjoys health so good as to be enabled to dispense altogether with our assistance,” said the physician, bowing in acknowledgment of the compliment thus paid him. “The most perfect piece of mechanism must necessarily need repair sometimes.”

“Decidedly so,” said Lord Ellingham. “But we will not assert that physicians are necessary evils, doctor—in the same sense as the lawyers are.”

“I appeal to Miss de Medina whether his lordship be not, by implication, too hard upon my profession,” exclaimed Lascalles, laughing.

“His lordship,” replied Esther, “was yesterday riding a very high-spirited horse; and had he been thrown in such a manner as to have incurred injury, I question whether he would have believed that his medical attendant was an evil, however necessary.”

“I owe you my profound gratitude for this powerful defence of my profession, Miss de Medina,” said the doctor, who had thus succeeded in compelling the young lady to speak.

He then raised his hat and passed on; but he had not proceeded many paces, when he was overtaken by Lord Ellingham, who had parted from his companions to have a few minutes’ conversation with the doctor.

“That is a lovely girl to whom your lordship has just introduced me,” said Lascalles.

“And as good in heart as she is beautiful in person,” exclaimed the nobleman.

“Ah!” cried the physician, with a sly glance: “is Lady Hatfield already forgotten?”

“Far from it!” said Arthur, his tone instantly becoming mournful and his countenance overclouded. “You cannot think me so fickle—so vacillating, doctor. No: the image of Georgiana is never absent from my memory. I had only encountered Mr. de Medina and his daughter a few minutes before we met you; and, not only am I bound to show them every attention in my power, as they are tenants of mine and were strongly recommended to me by mutual friends at Liverpool—but also I am glad to court intellectual society, wherever it can be found in this city, to distract my mind from the one topic which so constantly and so painfully engrosses it.”

“Are Mr. de Medina and his daughter such very agreeable companions?” inquired Lascalles, apparently in quite a casual manner.

“Mr. de Medina is a well-informed, intelligent, and even erudite man,” answered the Earl. “His daughter is highly accomplished, sensible, and amiable. I feel an additional interest in them, because they belong to a race whom it is the fashion to revile and often to despise. It is true that my acquaintance with Mr. de Medina and his daughter scarcely dates from a month back; but I have already seen—and if not, I have heard enough of them, to know that he is the pattern of integrity and the young lady the personification of every virtue.”



The doctor made no reply. Certain was he that he "could a tale unfold" which would totally undeceive his noble friend relative to the character of Esther. But his lips were sealed by a solemn vow; and, even if they were not, there was no necessity to detail how he had been summoned to attend on the young lady and rescue her from the fate and crime of suicide,—how he had good cause to know that she was either a wife or a mistress, but he suspected the latter,—how he had seen that splendid form stretched half-naked upon the bed, the bosom heaving convulsively with physical and mental agony, and the exquisitely modelled arms flung wildly about with excruciating pain,—how the large black eyes had been fixed imploringly upon him, and the vermillion lips had parted to give utterance to words demanding from himself the fiat of her life or death:—there was no necessity, we say, to narrate all this, even if no vow had bound him to silence, because Lord Ellingham sought not that lovely Jewess as a wife.

That Esther de Medina and the lady of South Moulton Street were one and the same person, the doctor felt convinced. The tones of Esther's voice, flowing upon the ear with such silver melody,—the

two rows of brilliant, beautiful teeth,—the face—the hair—the eyes,—the configuration of the form, with its fine but justly proportioned bust and slender waist,—all were identical! But what chiefly amazed—nay, bewildered the physician, was the calm indifference with which Esther had met his rapid, searching glance,—the admirable composure with which she had encountered him—the firmness, amounting almost to an insolent assurance, with which she had spoken to him,—never once quailing, nor blushing, nor manifesting the slightest embarrassment, but actually treating him as a person whom she saw for the first time, and as if he were totally unacquainted with any thing that militated against her character;—all this was naturally a subject of ineffable astonishment and wonder.

Lord Ellingham accompanied the doctor to Grafton Street; and when they had entered the house, Dr. Lascelles made him acquainted with Lady Hatfield's indisposition.

"She is ill!" ejaculated Arthur, profoundly touched by these tidings: "and I dare not call even to inquire concerning her!"

"And wherefore should you not manifest that courtesy?" asked the doctor.

"I must forget her—I cannot demonstrate any farther interest in her behalf!" exclaimed the nobleman. "If there really exist reasons which render it impossible or imprudent for her to change her condition by marriage, it is useless for us to meet again:—and if she be swayed by caprice, I cannot suffer myself to be made the sport of her whims."

"There are the wanton, wilful whims of a coquette," said the doctor, impressively; "and there are the delusions of the monomaniac—but the latter are not the less conscientiously believed, although they be nothing save delusions."

"Is it possible?" cried Arthur, a sudden ray of hope breaking in upon him. "Can Georgiana be subject to phantasies of that nature? Oh! then she can be cured, doctor—and your skill may yet make us happy!"

"Rest assured, my dear Earl," was the reply, "that all the knowledge which I possess shall be devoted to that purpose."

"My eternal gratitude will be due to you, doctor," said the nobleman. "With your permission I shall return in the evening to learn from you how your charming patient progresses."

The physician signified his assent; and Lord Ellingham took his departure, new hopes animating his soul.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OPIATE.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when Dr. Lascelles returned to Lady Hatfield's house on Piccadilly Hill.

Miss Mordaunt, whom he encountered in the drawing-room, informed him that Georgiana had become more composed and tranquil since she had taken the medicine which he had prescribed for her, and that she had requested to be left alone, as she experienced an inclination to sleep.

"It is nevertheless necessary that I should see her," said the physician.

Julia accordingly hastened to her friend's apartment, and speedily returned with the information that Lady Hatfield was not yet asleep, and that the doctor might walk up.

Lascelles immediately availed himself of this permission; but he found—as indeed he had fully anticipated—that his patient was rapidly yielding to the invincible drowsiness produced by the opiate medicine which he had prescribed for her.

He seated himself by the bed-side, asked her a few ordinary questions, and then suffered her to fall undisturbed into slumber.

At length she slept profoundly.

A smile of satisfaction played for a moment upon the lips of the physician; but it yielded to a sombre cloud which almost immediately succeeded it—for a powerful struggle now suddenly arose in the breast of Dr. Lascelles.

In his ardent devotion to the science which he professed, he longed to satisfy himself on certain points at present admitting of doubt and involved in uncertainty: and, on the other hand, he hesitated at the accomplishment of a deed which he could not help regarding as a gross abuse of his privileges as a medical man. By virtue of the most sacred confidence he was admitted to the bed-chamber of his

female patient; and he shrank from exercising that right in an illegitimate way.

Then, again, he reasoned to himself that if he were enabled to ascertain beyond all doubt that no physical cause induced Lady Hatfield to shrink from marriage, he must fall back upon the theory that she had become subject to certain monomaniac notions which influenced her mind to her own unhappiness; and he at length persuaded himself that he should be acting for her best interests, were he to put into execution the project which he had already formed.

Such an opinion, operating upon a man who possessed but few of the delicate and refined feelings of our nature, and who was ever ready to sacrifice all considerations to the cause of the medical science, speedily banished hesitation.

Having convinced himself that Georgiana slept so profoundly that there was no chance of awaking her, he locked the door, and again approached the bed.

And now his sacrilegious hands drew aside the snow-white dress which covered the sleeping lady's bosom; and the treasures of that gently-heaving breast were exposed to his view. But not a sensual thought was thereby excited in his mind: cold and passionless, he surveyed the beauteous spectacle only as a sculptor might measure the proportions of a marble Venus or Diana the huntress.

And not a trace of cancer was there: no unseemly mark, nor mole, nor scar, nor wound disfigured the glowing orbs that, rising from a broad and ample chest, swelled laterally over the upper part of the arms.

Yet wherefore did Dr. Lascelles abruptly start and why did his countenance suddenly assume an expression of surprise—or rather of mingled doubt and astonishment—as his glances wandered over the fair bust thus exposed to his view?

Carefully and cautiously refastening the strings of the night-dress, he now assumed the air of a man who had discovered some clue to a mystery hitherto profoundly veiled; and unhesitatingly did he resolve to clear up all his doubts and all his newly-awakened suspicions.

* * * * *

Five minutes afterwards Dr. Lascelles left the room, Lady Hatfield still remaining buried in a deep slumber.

His countenance expressed surprise mingled with sorrow; and, cold—phlegmatic though his disposition was, he could not help murmuring to himself, "Is it possible?"

Having just looked into the drawing-room, to take leave of Miss Mordaunt, and state that his patient was progressing as favourably as could be expected, Dr. Lascelles returned home.

Lord Ellingham was waiting for him; and this interview the physician now dreaded.

"Are your tidings favourable, doctor?" was the nobleman's hasty and anxious inquiry.

"I regret, my dear Earl," answered Lascelles, "that I should have encouraged hopes—"

"Which are doomed to experience disappointment," added Arthur bitterly. "Oh! I might have anticipated this—unfortunate being that I am! But how have you ascertained that your ideas of this morning are unfounded? How have you convinced yourself that Georgiana is not a prey to those mental

eccentricities which your skill might reach? Has she revealed to you her motive for refusing—for rejecting me,—*me* whom she professes to love?”

“She has revealed nothing, my lord,” replied the doctor solemnly. “But I have satisfied myself that monomania and Lady Hatfield are total strangers to each other.”

“Then must I abandon all hope!” exclaimed the Earl; “for it is evident that I am the victim of a ridiculous caprice. And yet,” he added, a sudden thought striking him, “I will see her once again. She is ill—she is suffering—perhaps she will be pleased to behold me—and who knows—”

“Not this evening, my lord—not this evening!” cried the doctor, stopping the nobleman who had seized his hat and was darting towards the door. “Lady Hatfield sleeps—and she must not be disturbed.”

But Lord Ellingham was too full of his new idea to pay any attention to the physician; and he rushed from the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOVER AND THE UNCLE.

A FEW minutes brought Arthur to the residence of Lady Hatfield; and his hand was already upon the knocker, when a sudden idea struck him—and he asked himself, “How can I demand admission to the bed-chamber of Georgiana?”

The madness of his project now being evident to him, he mournfully turned away, when the door suddenly opened, and a tall, stout, fine-looking man, dressed as a country squire, issued from the house.

Lord Ellingham immediately recognised Sir Ralph Walsingham, Georgiana’s uncle, with whom he was well acquainted. The baronet also perceived the Earl; and they shook each other cordially by the hand.

“Were you about to call?” inquired Sir Ralph.

“I was,” answered Lord Ellingham. “Hearing of Lady Hatfield’s illness—”

“She is better—much better,” interrupted the baronet. “I have just left her; and she has not long awoken from a profound and refreshing slumber.”

“I am delighted to hear these tidings,” said the nobleman.

The servant, seeing that Sir Ralph had stopped to converse with the Earl, still kept the door open; and, as Arthur had admitted that he was about to call, there was now no alternative save for him to leave his card.

The baronet then took his arm; and they walked away together.

“Georgiana is a singular being,” observed Sir Ralph; “and although she is my niece, yet there are times when I hardly know what to make of her. She is too intellectual—too steady—to be capricious; and still—”

“My dear Sir Ralph,” interrupted the Earl, “you have touched upon the very topic concerning which I longed to speak the moment I met you. Will you accompany me to my abode, and favour me for a short period with your attention to what I am so anxious to confide to you?”

“With pleasure,” was the reply. “But I have already learnt from Georgiana’s lips the principal

fact to which your lordship doubtless alludes; and it was indeed for the purpose of introducing the subject that I ere now made the remark relative to the occasional incomprehensibility of her character. Let us not, however, continue the discourse in the public street.”

The nobleman and the baronet speedily reached the mansion of the former in Pall-Mall West; and when they were seated in an elegantly furnished apartment, with a bottle of claret before them, they renewed the conversation.

“Georgiana,” said the baronet, “has informed me that your lordship has honoured her by the offer of your hand; and I need hardly assure you how rejoiced I should feel to welcome as a relative one whom I already esteem as a friend. But—to my inexpressible surprise—I find that—that—”

“That she has refused me,” exclaimed the Earl; —“refused me without assigning any reason.”

“I cannot think how it is to be accounted for,” continued the baronet; “but Georgiana has invariably manifested a repugnance to the topic of marriage whenever I have urged it upon her. Of course, as her uncle—and double her age, my lord—I can give her advice just as if I were her father; and for some years past I have recommended her to consider well the propriety of obtaining a legal protector, her natural ones being no more. But all my reasoning has proved unavailing; and if your lordship cannot persuade my obstinate niece,” he added, with a sly laugh, “then no one must hope to do so.”

“I will frankly admit to you,” said the Earl, “that my happiness depends on your niece’s decision. I am no hero of romance—but I entertain so sincere, so ardent an affection for Lady Hatfield, that my life will be embittered by a perseverance in her refusal to allow me to call her mine.”

“She will not persist in this folly—she cannot,” exclaimed Sir Ralph emphatically. “It is a mere whim—a caprice; and indeed I have often thought that her disposition has somewhat altered ever since a dreadful fright which she sustained six or seven years ago—”

“Ah!” said the Earl. “What was the nature of the incident to which you allude?”

“I must tell your lordship,” returned the baronet, —“unless, indeed, you are already acquainted with the fact,—that Hampshire was for three or four years—between 1818 and 1821 or 22—the scene of the exploits of a celebrated highwayman—”

“You allude to the Black Mask, no doubt?” interrupted Lord Ellingham interrogatively.

“Precisely so,” answered the baronet. “The Black Mask—as the villain was called—was one of the most desperate robbers that ever infested the highways. He would stop the stage-coach as readily as he would a single traveller on horseback; and such was his valour as well as his extraordinary skill, that he defied all attempts to capture him.”

“I remember reading his exploits at the time,” said the Earl. “The most conflicting accounts were reported concerning him. Some declared he was an old man—others that he was quite young; but I believe that all agreed in ascribing to him a more forbearing disposition than usually characterises persons of his class.”

“I will even go so far as to assert that there was something chivalrous in his character,” exclaimed the baronet. “He invariably assured travellers

whom he stopped, that he should be grieved to harm them; but that if they provoked him by resistance, he would not hesitate to punish them severely. If he fell in with a carriage containing ladies, he never attempted to ride them of their jewellery and trinkets, but contented himself with simply demanding their purses. Those being surrendered, he would gallop away. I never heard of any unnecessary violence—nor of any act of cruelty which he perpetrated. Neither did I ever meet a soul who could give anything like a credible description of his countenance. The invariable black mask which concealed his features, and from the use of which he derived his name, seemed a portion of himself; and although gossips did now and then tell strange tales about his appearance, they were all too contradictory to allow a scintillation of the real truth to transpire."

"But in what manner was the Black Mask connected with the fright which Lady Hatfield experienced some years ago?" asked the Earl impatiently.

"You are perhaps aware that the late Earl and Countess of Mauleverer possessed a country-seat between Winchester and New Alresford—not very far distant from Walsingham Manor, my own rural abode," said Sir Ralph. "It must have been seven years ago that Georgiana, who always preferred Mauleverer Lodge to the town-mansion—even during the London season,—was staying alone there—I mean so far alone, that at the time there were no other persons at the Lodge save the servants. Well, one night the Black Mask broke into the place—the only time he was ever known to commit a burglary—and such was the fright which Georgiana experienced, that for weeks and months afterwards her family frequently trembled lest her reason had received a shock."

"It must indeed have been an alarming situation for a young lady—alone, as it were, in a spacious and secluded country dwelling—"

"And Georgiana was but eighteen, I think, at the time," interrupted Sir Ralph Walsingham. "She certainly experienced a dreadful fright; and although, thank God! her reason is as unimpaired as ever it was, still we cannot say that the sudden shock might not have produced some strange effect which may probably account for the otherwise inexplicable whimsicality—for I can denominate it nothing else—"

"Oh! I thank you, my dear Sir Ralph, for this explanation," cried Lord Ellingham, in the joy of reviving hope. "Yes—I see it all: your niece experienced a shock which has produced a species of idiosyncratic effect upon her; but the constant kindness—the unwearied attention of one who loves her, and whom she loves in return, will restore her mind to its vigorous and healthy condition. Tomorrow will I visit her again:—Oh! how unkind—how ungenerous of me to remain away so long!"

There was a pause, during which Arthur gave way to all the bright allurements of the pleasing vision which he now conjured up to his imagination.

At length Sir Ralph Walsingham felt the silence to be irksome and awkward; and he ventured to break it.

"We were talking just now, my lord," he said, "of the famous highwayman known as the Black Mask. He disappeared from Hampshire very suddenly; and the old women declared that his time

being out, he was carried off by the Devil, who had protected him against all the devices and snares imagined by the authorities to capture him."

"And perhaps the highwayman who robbed Lady Hatfield the other day," observed Lord Ellingham, "may be the very one who rendered himself so notorious in Hampshire a few years ago?"

"Your lordship judges by the fact that the scoundrel who stopped my niece near Hounslow wore a black mask," said the baronet; "but the generality of robbers on the high roads adopt that mode of disguise. Thank heaven! public depredators of the kind are becoming very scarce in this country!"

In such conversation did the nobleman and the baronet while away the time until eleven o'clock, when the latter took his leave, and Arthur retired to his chamber to dream of the charming but incomprehensible lady who had obtained such empire over his soul.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.—JACOB.

ON the same evening that the interview between the Earl of Ellingham and Sir Ralph Walsingham took place, as narrated in the preceding chapter, the following scene occurred at the house of Toby Bunce in Earl Street, Seven Dials.

Mrs. Bunce was alone in the dirty, dingy back room, which could not be said to be lighted, but merely redeemed from total darkness, by the solitary candle that stood on the table; and she was busily employed in lighting the fire.

Having succeeded in this object, she placed the kettle on the grate to boil; and then took from a cupboard a bottle half full of gin, two common blue mugs, a broken basin containing a little lump sugar, and a couple of pewter spoons, all of which articles she ranged around the brass candle-stick with a view to make as good a show as possible.

Then she seated herself by the fire, and consulted an old silver-watch which she drew from her pocket, and which was in reality the property of her husband, whom she would not however trust with it under any consideration.

"Eight o'clock," she said aloud in a musing tone. "He can't be very long now; and Toby won't be in till ten. If he is, I'll send him out again—with a flea in his ear," she added, chuckling at the idea of her supremacy in her own domestic sphere. "I wonder who'd be ruled by a feller like Toby? Not me, indeed! I should think not. But I wish old Bones would come," she continued, with a glance of satisfaction at the table. "Every thing does look so comfortable; and I've put 'em in such a manner that the light falls on 'em all at once. Toby never would have thought of that. It's only us women that know what tidiness is."

Tidiness indeed! The windows were dingy with dirt—the walls were begrimed with smoke and dust—the floor was as black as the deck of a collier—and the cobwebs hung like filthy rags in the corners of the room.

Scarcely had Mrs. Bunce completed her survey of the place and its arrangements, when a low knock summoned her to the street-door; and in a few moments she returned, accompanied by Old Death.

The hideous man was very cold; and, seating

himself as near the fire as possible without actually burning his knees, he said, "Now, Betsy my dear, brew me a mug of something cheering as soon as possible."

"That I will, Ben," returned Mrs. Bunce, in as pleasant a tone of voice as she could assume; then she bustled about with great alacrity until the steaming liquid was duly compounded, and Old Death had expressed his satisfaction by means of a short grunt after the first sip.

"Is it nice, Ben?" asked Mrs. Bunce endearingly. "Very. Now make yourself some, Betsy; and sit down quietly, for we must have a talk about you know what. Business has prevented me from attending to it before; but now that I have got an evening to spare—and Toby is out of the way—"

"Oh! you know very well, Ben," interrupted Mrs. Bunce, "that I can always manage *him* as I like. He's such a fool, and so completely under my thumb, that I should n't even mind telling him I'd been your mistress for years before I was his wife."

"Keep your tongue quiet, Betsy—keep your tongue quiet," exclaimed Old Death, with a hyena-like growl. "Never provoke irritation unnecessarily. But let's to business. Jacob is out on the watch after Tom Rain; and I told the lad to come up here before ten. And now about this letter," he continued drawing one from his pocket-book: "it proves, you see, that the child is well-born—and if the address had only been written on the outside, we might make a good thing of the matter."

"Just so," observed Mrs. Bunce. "When Mr. Rainford called this afternoon he was so particular in asking me whether I had found any papers about the woman's clothes; but I declared I had not—and he was quite satisfied. He paid me, too, very handsome for the funeral expenses and all my trouble. If he was to know about that letter, Ben?"

"How can he know?" exclaimed Old Death impatiently. "Now what I think," he continued in a milder tone, "is just this:—the woman Watts was reduced to such a desperate state of poverty, that she wrote this letter to the mother of the boy Charles—"

"Why, of course," interrupted Mrs. Bunce. "She says as much in the letter."

"Will you listen to me?" growled Old Death angrily: "you don't know what I was going to observe."

"Do n't be cross, Ben: I won't stop you again," said the woman in a coaxing tone.

"Mind you do n't, then," ejaculated Bones, allowing himself to be pacified. "Well, this Sarah Watts wrote that letter, as I was saying, with the intention of sending it, no doubt, either by post or by an acquaintance to the lady in London. I think that is plain enough. Then, when she had finished writing it, something evidently made her change her mind, and resolve on coming up to London herself. This is also plain; because, if it was n't so, why did the letter never go—and why did she come to London?"

"How well you do talk, Ben," said Mrs. Bunce.

"I talk to the point, I hope," observed Old Death. "Now how stands the matter? Here is a very important letter, wanting two main things to render it completely valuable to us. The first thing it

wants is the name of the place from which it would have been dated, had it ever been sent: and the second thing it wants is the name of the lady to whom it was intended to be sent. In a word, it wants the address of the writer and the address of the lady to whom it was written, and who is the mother of that boy Charles."

"What good would it do you to have the address of the writer, since she is dead and buried?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"Because I could then visit the place where the woman was when she wrote this letter," replied Old Death. "I could make inquiries concerning the late Sarah Watts; and I know too well how to put two and two together not to arrive at some certainty in the long run."

"To be sure!" ejaculated Mrs. Bunce. "How clever you are, dear Ben."

"I don't know about being clever, Betsy my dear," returned the hideous old man; "but *this* I do think—that I'm rather wide awake."

And then he chuckled so heartily, while his toothless jaws wagged up and down so horribly, that he appeared to be a corpse under a process of galvanism; for if a dead body could be made to utter sounds, they would not be more sepulchral than those which now emanated from the throat of Old Death.

Mrs. Bunce considered it to be her duty to chuckle also; and her querulous tones seemed a humble accompaniment to the guttural sounds which we have attempted to describe.

At length the chuckling ceased on both sides; and Mrs. Bunce replenished the mugs with hot gin-and-water.

"But even as it is," suddenly observed Old Death, after a hasty glance at the letter, which he now slowly folded up and returned to his greasy pocket-book,—“but even as it is, we may still make something of the business. If we could only find a clue to the mother of that boy, it would be a fortune in itself. I tell you what we must do!” he exclaimed emphatically.

"What?" asked his ancient mistress.

"Get that boy into our own keeping," replied Bones, with a sly smile; "and then we can pump him of all he may happen to know concerning the deceased Sarah Watts."

"Excellent!" cried Mrs. Bunce, clapping her hands. "But how will you find out where Mr. Rainford lives?"

"Jacob is after him. For several reasons I want to know as much as I can about that strange fellow. The very day that I made the bargain with him about smashing all the flumsies he might bring me, he wrote an extraordinary note to the very lady whom he had robbed the night before; and he made her go into the witness-box at Bow Street and deliberately perjure herself to serve him. Then he starts off to Pall Mall, when the Jewess prisoner was brought up, and delivers a note at the house of Lord Ellingham; and Lord Ellingham comes straight down to the Police-Court and swears black and blue that the Jewess is innocent."

"And was she?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"That's more than I can say," answered Old Death; "seeing that I know nothing at all about the affair. Well, these two strange things, showing an extraordinary influence on the part of Rainford over Lady Hatfield on the one side, and Lord

Ellingham on the other, have quite puzzled me. He is an enigma that I must solve."

"Does not Tullock know all about him?" demanded Mrs. Bunce.

"Tullock knows only that Tom took to the road some years ago, down in the country; for Tullock then did at Winchester just what I do now in London: only," added Bones, with a knowing glance and a compressed smile of the lips which puckered up his hideous face into one unvaried mass of wrinkles,—“only, my dear Betsy, Tullock never had the connexion which I have. He had no correspondent at Hamburg to whom he could send over the notes that are stolen, and stopped at the Bank: he had no well-contrived places to receive goods—places,” continued Old Death, emphatically, “which have baffled the police for thirty years, and will baffle them as long again—if I live.”

"And why should you not, dear?" said Mrs. Bunce coaxingly.

"Because I cannot expect it," replied Old Death abruptly. "However—you know what I have done for myself, and in what way I manage my business. You only, Betsy dear, are acquainted with my secrets."

"And you are as safe with me as if I was deaf and dumb and unable to write," rejoined the woman.

"I know that—I know that," said Bones, hastily: then in a slower tone he added significantly, "Because if there was a smash, we should all go together, Betsy."

"Lor! Ben—don't talk in that way—don't!" cried Mrs. Bunce. "Let's see—what were we saying? Oh! you was telling me about Mr. Rainford."

"I was only observing that Tullock lost sight of him for some years, and knows nothing that happened to him till he turned up in London the other day."

"I don't suppose Rainford is his proper name?" observed the woman inquiringly.

"Tullock never told me," answered Bones; "and as he and Tom are thick together, I can't ask him too many questions. The fact is, Rainford will prove the most useful man I ever had in my service, as I may call it; and I must not risk offending him. See how neatly he did that job the other night—how beautifully he came off with the two thousand!"

"And it never got into the papers either," observed Mrs. Bunce.

"Not a bit of it!" cried Old Death, with another chuckle. "Tom calculated all that beforehand—or he never would have been fool enough to go so quietly and introduce himself as Captain Sparks to the very people he meant to rob. Ha! ha! clear-headed fellow; that Tom! He first ascertained the precise character of all the parties concerned; and he knew that he might plunder them with impunity. Sir Christopher and Mr. Torrens were sure not to talk about it, for fear of the whole disgraceful story about the purchase of the daughter coming out. Frank Curtis is a cowardly boaster, who would not like it to be known that a single highwayman had mastered him;—the lawyer was sure to speak or hold his tongue, just as his rich client Sir Christopher ordered him;—and Jeffreys was safe. Tom weighed all this, and boldly introduced himself to them without the least attempt at disguising his person. Oh! it was capitally managed—and Tom is a valuable fellow!"

Mr. Bones seldom spoke so long at a time; but he was carried away by his enthusiastic admiration of Tom Rainford; and he accordingly talked himself so effectually out of breath, that a fit of coughing supervened, and he was nearly choked.

Betsy, however, slapped him on the back; and the old man gradually recovered himself—but not before his fierce-looking eyes were dimmed with the scalding rheum which overflowed them.

"You are afraid to offend Mr. Rainford," said Mrs. Bunce, after a pause, "and yet you think of taking away that boy from him."

"Pshaw!" cried Old Death, whom the coughing-fit had put into a bad humour; "do you think I should steal the child and then tell him of it?"

"Of course not," said Mrs. Bunce. "I am a fool."

"You are indeed, Betsy," rejoined Old Death. "And yet you are the *least* foolish woman I ever know; or else I never should have made you my confidant as I have done. And now I tell you, Betsy, that I have many great schemes in my head; and I shall require your assistance. In the first place we must get hold of that boy Charley somehow or another—provided we can find out Rainford's abode, which I think is scarcely doubtful. Then we must act upon all the information we can glean from the child, and find out who his mother really is. In the next place I must ascertain all I can concerning this Jewess—this Esther de Medina. If she *did* steal the diamonds, she is the cleverest female thief in all England—for she has managed to get clean off with her prize; and such a woman would be invaluable to me. Besides, if she pursues the same game—supposing that she has resily begun it—she will want my assistance to dispose of the property; and she will gladly listen to my overtures. Such a beautiful creature as I understand she is, could insinuate herself any where, and rob the best houses in London. Ah! Betsy, I must not sleep over these matters. But, hark! That's Jacob's knock!"

"Poor Jacob!" cried Mrs. Bunce, with a subdued sigh: "if he only knew—"

"Silence, woman!" cried Bones in a furious manner. "Go to the door."

Mrs. Bunce was frightened by the vehemence of Old Death's manner, and hastened to obey his command.

In a few moments she returned, followed by Jacob, who seemed sinking with fatigue.

"Well," said Old Death impatiently, "what news?"

"Give me something to eat first—for I am famished," cried Jacob, throwing himself upon a chair.

"Not a morsel, till you tell me what you have done!" exclaimed Bones angrily, as he rose from his seat.

"I will *not* speak a word on that subject before I have had food," said Jacob, his bright eyes flashing fire, and a hectic glow appearing on his pale cheeks. "You make me wander about all day on your business, without a penny in my pocket to buy a piece of bread—"

"Because he who has to earn his supper works all the better for it," ejaculated Bones, his lips quivering with rage. "Now speak, Jacob—or, by God—"

"You sha'n't bully me in this way," cried the lad, bursting into tears, and yet with all the evidences of

intense passion working upon his countenance. "By what right do you treat me like a dog? You fling me a bone when you choose—and you think I will lick your hand like a spaniel. I tell you once for all, I won't put up with it any longer."

"You won't, Jacob—you won't, eh?" said Old Death, in a very low tone; but at the same time he dealt the lad such a sudden and severe box on the ears, that the poor youth was hurled heavily from his chair on the hard floor.

But, springing up in a moment, he flew like a tiger at Old Death, whose small amount of strength was exhausted by the effort which it had required on the part of so aged a man to deal such a blow; and Jacob would have mastered him in another instant, had not Mrs. Bunce interfered.

With a loud scream, she precipitated herself on the lad; and, seizing him in her bony arms, forced him back into his seat, saying—"There, Jacob—for God's sake be quiet; and I'll give you something nice directly."

The lad made no reply, but darted a look of vindictive hate towards Old Death, who had sunk back exhausted on the chair which he had ere now quitted.

Then Mrs. Bunce hastened to the cupboard and produced a loaf and the remains of a cold joint, which she placed before Jacob, who, enraged as he was at the treatment he had just received, could not help wondering within himself how Toby's wife had become so liberal as to place the viands without reserve at his disposal.

The woman seemed to penetrate his thoughts; for she said, "Eat as much as you like, Jacob: do n't be afraid. I sha'n't mind if you eat it—*nearly* all."

The lad smothered his resentment so far as not to permit it to interfere with his appetite; and he devoured his supper without once glancing towards Old Death, who on his side appeared unable to recover from the surprise into which Jacob's unusually rebellious conduct had thrown him.

A profound silence reigned in that room for several minutes.

At length Jacob made an end of his meal; and then Old Death spoke.

"And so this is the reward," he said, "which I receive for all my kindness towards you. Without me, what would have become of you? Deserted by your parents—a foundling—a miserable infant, abandoned to the tender mercies of the workhouse authorities—"

"Would that I had died *then*!" interrupted Jacob emphatically. "You make a boast of having taken care of me—of having reared me—such a rearing as it has been!—and yet I wish you had left me to perish on the workhouse steps where, you say, you found me. I have tried to be obedient to you—I have done all I could to please you; but do you ever utter a kind word to me? Even when I succeed in doing your bidding, what reward is mine? Blows—reproaches—sorry meals, few and far between—"

"Well, well, Jacob—I think I have not *quite* done my duty towards you," said Old Death, who in reality could have murdered the boy at that moment, but who was compelled to adopt a conciliatory tone and manner in order to retain so useful an auxiliary in his service: "but let us say no more about it—and things shall be better in future. Instead of having no regular place of abode and sleep-

ing in lodging-houses, you shall have half-a-crown a week, Jacob, to hire a little room for yourself."

"There—Jacob; only think of that!" cried Mrs. Bunce, in a tone expressive of high approval of this munificence on the part of Old Death.

"And you shall have three-pence every day for your dinner, Jacob," continued Bones, "in addition to your breakfast and tea which you always get here."

"But will you keep to that arrangement?" asked the lad, considerably softened by this prospect, which was far brighter than any he had as yet beheld.

"I will—I will," replied Old Death. "And if you have brought me any good news to-night, I'll give you ten shillings—ten whole shillings, Jacob—to buy some nice clothes and shoes in Monmouth Street."

"Put down the money!" cried Jacob, now completely won back to the interests of the crafty old villain who knew so well how to curb the evanescent spirit of his miserable slave.

"I will," said Bones; and he laid four half-crowns upon the table.

"That's right!" exclaimed Jacob, his eyes glistening with delight at the prospect of fingering such a treasure: then he glanced rapidly at his ragged apparel, with a smile on his lip that expressed his conviction of shortly being able to procure a more comfortable attire.

"Go on," said Old Death. "What have you done?"

"When Mr. Rainford went away from here this afternoon," returned Jacob, "I followed him at a good distance—but not so far off that I stood a chance of losing sight of him. Well, first he went to Tullock's; and there he stayed some little time. Then he walked into an eating-house in the Strand; and at that place he stopped about a couple of hours—while I walked up and down on the other side of the way. At length he came out, with another gentleman—"

"What was he like?" demanded Old Death.

"A fine—tall—handsome man—with dark hair and-eyes," responded Jacob.

"I don't know him," said Bones. "Never mind;—go on with your story, and let it be as short as possible."

"Well," continued the lad, "this gentleman and Mr. Rainford walked together as far as Bridge Street, Blackfriars: and there they parted. The gentleman went into a house in Bridge Street—and Mr. Rainford crossed the bridge. It was now getting dusk; and I was obliged to keep closer to him. But he seldom turned round—and when he did, I took good care he should not see me. So, on he went till he came to the Elephant and Castle; and close by there he suddenly met a lady with a dark veil over her face, and holding a little boy by the hand. They stood and talked for a moment just opposite a shop-window which was lighted up; and I saw well enough that the little boy was the very same that was brought here the other night by the woman who was buried so quietly this morning."

"Then we know that the boy is still in *his* care!" ejaculated Old Death, exchanging significant glances with Mrs. Bunce. "Go on, Jacob. I can see that the ten shillings will be yours."

"Yes—that they will!" cried the lad, apparently having forgotten the blow which he had recently received. "Well, so I knew the boy at once, though

he is much changed—nicely dressed, and already quite plump and rosy. Mr. Rainford patted him on the face, and the boy laughed and seemed so happy! Then Mr. Rainford gave the lady his arm; and they walked a little way down the road till they came to a jeweller's shop, where they stopped to look in at the window. Mr. Rainford pointed out some article to the lady; and they went into the shop, the lady still holding the little boy carefully by the hand. The moment they were safe inside, I watched them through the window; and I saw Mr. Rainford looking at a pair of ear-rings. In a few moments he handed them to the lady. She lifted up her veil to examine them; and I knew her again in a moment. But who do you think she was?"

Old Death shook his head.

"No—I don't think you ever could guess," cried Jacob.

"Then who is she?" demanded Bones impatiently.

"The Jewess who was accused of stealing the diamonds at Bow Street the other day," answered Jacob.

"Esther de Medina!" cried Old Death. "The very person we were speaking about just now!" he added, exchanging another glance with Mrs. Bunce. "But go on, Jacob—go on."

"I was rather surprised at that discovery," continued Jacob; "because I thought it so odd that both Mr. Rainford and the Jewess should have been had up on the very same day at Bow Street, on different charges, and that both should have got off."

"It is strange—very strange!" murmured Old Death. "But did you find out Tom Rain's address? That is the chief thing I want to know."

"Do n't be in a hurry," said Jacob: "let me tell my story in my own way. Well, so the Jewess seemed to like the ear-rings; and she gave Mr. Rainford such a sweet smile—Oh! what a sweet smile—as he pulled out his purse and paid for them. I do n't know how it was—but it really went to my heart to think that such a beautiful lady should—"

"Never mind what you felt, Jacob," interrupted Old Death abruptly. "Make an end of your story."

"Well, the ear-rings were put into a nice little box, with some wool to keep them from rubbing; and the lady drew down her veil again, before she left the shop."

"Now, Jacob—tell me the truth," said Old Death: "did either Tom Rain or the Jewess take any little thing—at a moment, you know, when the jeweller's back was turned—"

"No—not a thing!" cried the lad emphatically. "I can swear they did not."

"You are quite sure?" observed Old Death.

"As sure as that I'm here; for I never took my eyes off them from the moment they entered the shop till they came out," responded Jacob. "And when they did come out, I was very near being seen by Mr. Rainford—for I was then in front of them; and I had only just time to slip into the shade of the wall between the windows of the jeweller's shop and the next one. Then I heard Mr. Rainford say to the Jewess, '*Now this little present is in part a recompense for the diamonds which I made you give up.*'—The lady said something in a low tone; but I could not catch it—and they went on, the little boy with them."

"Then she did steal the diamonds!" exclaimed

Old Death. "But how could such a man as Lord Ellingham feel any interest in her? and how could he have been induced to perjure himself to save her?"

"Is n't it strange?" said Mrs. Bunce.

"I'm all in the dark at present," returned Bones. "But go on, Jacob."

"They walked on till they came to a street on the left-hand side; and into that street they turned. I never lost sight of them once; but two or three times I thought Mr. Rainford would have twigged me. He did not, though; and I at last traced them to a house in Lock's Fields—"

"Lock's Fields—oh?" cried Old Death. "Can they possibly be living there?"

"They are," returned Jacob; "and I can take you over to the very street and the very house any time you like."

"Well done!" ejaculated Bones, indulging in another long and hearty chuckle, which was echoed by Mrs. Bunce; and then they both rubbed their hands gleefully to think that they had made such important discoveries through the medium of Jacob.

Fresh supplies of grog were brewed; and the lad was not only permitted to consign the four half-crowns to his pocket, but was also regaled with an occasional sip of gin-and-water from Mrs. Bunce's own mug.

The return of Toby at ten o'clock prevented any further conversation on the interesting topics which had previously been discussed; for Mrs. Bunce's husband was not admitted to the entire confidence of his spouse and of Mr. Benjamin Bones, alias Old Death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LOVERS.

It was noon; and Lady Hatfield sat alone in her drawing-room.

She felt herself so much better, and Dr. Lascelles had that morning so earnestly recommended her to quit the bed-chamber and seek the change of scene which even a removal from one apartment to another ever affords—especially to an invalid, that she had not hesitated to follow her own inclination and his advice, both of which were fully of accord.

Her uncle, Sir Ralph Walsingham, was announced shortly after Lady Hatfield had descended to the drawing-room.

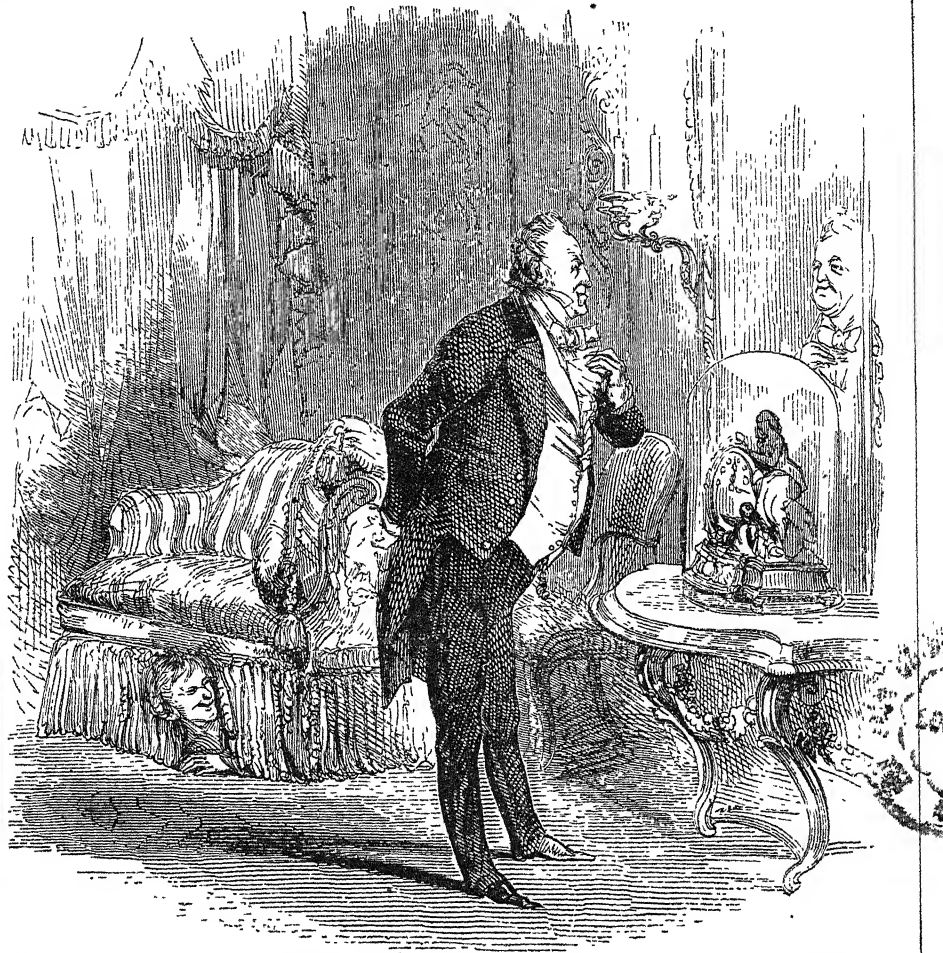
"My dear Georgiana," exclaimed the honest and kind-hearted man, as he entered the apartment, "I am delighted to find you here. But why are you alone? Where is Miss Mordaunt?"

"In the parlour below," replied Lady Hatfield. "Julia has a visitor," she added with an arch smile, in spite of the melancholy which still oppressed her mind.

"A visitor!" ejaculated the baronet. "Sir Christopher Blunt, I'll be bound!"

"You have guessed rightly, my dear uncle. But how—"

"How should I know anything about it?" interrupted Sir Ralph. "Surely, Georgiana, you must be too well acquainted with your friend's disposition to suppose that she could have possibly held her tongue relative to the presumed attachment of the worthy knight? Why, all the time she was at the



Manor, did she not absolutely hurl Sir Christopher's name at every soul whom she could engage in conversation? Was it not 'Sir Christopher had told her *this* last season,' and 'Sir Christopher had assured her *that*?' and did she not go much farther than merely to hint that Sir Christopher was dying for her? For my part, I was sick of Sir Christopher's name. But now I suppose he has come to lay his title and fortune at her feet, as the newspapers say: or else what could possibly signify a visit at so unseemly an hour as mid-day?"

"It will be an excellent match for Julia," remarked Georgiana, by way of saying something. "She is not one of those who believe that marriage should be only a convention of hearts, and not of worldly interests."

And as Lady Hatfield made this observation, a profound sigh escaped her bosom.

"What means that sigh, niece?" demanded the baronet. "Are you envious of Miss Mordaunt's worldly-mindedness? I am convinced you are not. By the way, I met Lord Ellingham last evening—"

"His lordship left his card," said Lady Hatfield,

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casting down her eyes, while her bosom again rose and fell with a long and painfully-drawn sigh.

"Georgiana," exclaimed Sir Ralph, seating himself by the side of his niece, and taking her hand in a kind manner, "your conduct towards that young Earl is not just—is not generous—is not rational."

"Oh! my dear uncle," cried Lady Hatfield, starting wildly, "for heaven's sake renew not the discussion of last evening!"

"Pardon me, my dear niece," said Sir Ralph, affectionately but firmly, "if I give you pain by referring to the topic of that discussion. I am your nearest relation—I am a widower, and childless: you know that my property is extensive—and my fond hope has ever been, since the death of your aunt Lady Walsingham, that you would marry, and that your children should inherit those estates and that fortune which I can bequeath to whomsoever I will. But you refuse to accept the hand of a man who is every way worthy of you—you reject an alliance which, in every human probability, would be blessed by a progeny to whom my wealth and yours may alike descend. Nay—interrupt me not, dear Georgiana: I am old enough to be your father—I

love you as if you were my daughter—and I have your welfare deeply at heart. To speak frankly, I had a long conversation last evening with Lord Ellingham—”

Georgiana's attention was for an instant broken by a wild start of despair.

“My God! what signifies this grief, Georgiana?” asked her uncle. “I thought to give you pleasure by the assurance I was about to disclose,—an assurance which conveys to you the unalterable fidelity of the Earl's affection—his readiness to bury in oblivion any little whim or caprice which induced you to subject him to the humiliation of a refusal the other day—his determination to study your happiness so entirely that any cloud of melancholy, or unknown and unfounded presentiment—any morbid feeling, in a word—which hangs upon your mind, shall speedily be dissipated. Such are his generous intentions—such are his tender aspirations, Georgiana—can you reject his suit again?”

This appeal, made to the unhappy lady by an individual who, though only related to her by the fact of having married her mother's sister, had still ever manifested towards her the sincerest affection and friendship,—this appeal, we say, came with such overwhelming force upon the mind of Georgiana, that she knew not how to answer it.

“You consent, Georgiana—you consent!” exclaimed Sir Ralph, entirely mistaking the cause of her profound silence; and, starting up, he rushed from the room before her lips could give utterance to a syllable that might have the effect of stopping him.

“Merciful God! what does he mean to do?” cried Georgiana, clasping her hands together, while a species of spasmodic shuddering came over her entire frame.

Hasty footsteps approached the door.

Wildly did the unhappy lady glance around her—with the terrified and imploring air of one whom the officers of justice were about to fetch to the scaffold.

The door flew open: Georgiana averted her eyes;—but at the next moment her hands were grasped in those of another, and warm lips were pressed upon each fair hand of hers—and for a single instant there streamed through her whole being the electric warmth of ineffable delight, hope, and love!

She sank back upon the sofa whence she had risen: her eyes, which for a moment had seemed to lose the faculty of sight, were involuntarily turned toward the Earl of Ellingham, who was kneeling at her feet;—and simultaneously her uncle's voice, sounding like the knell of destiny upon her ears, exclaimed, “I told you she had consented, Ellingham: be happy—for Georgiana is yours!”

The door of the apartment was then closed hastily; and Lady Hatfield now knew that she was alone with her lover.

“Oh! my dearest Georgiana,” murmured Arthur, still pressing the lady's hands in his own, “how happy have you at length made me—and how can I ever express the joy which animates me at this moment! My heart dances wildly with joy and gratitude; and all the anguish which I have lately experienced, is forgotten—as if it never had been. Indeed, my beloved one, it is for me to implore your pardon—for I should not have remained absent from you so long. But now that we are re-united, and your indisposition has passed,—now that your mind has

recovered its naturally healthy tone,—there is nothing, my Georgiana, to interrupt the free course of our felicity.”

Lady Hatfield was seized with a certain involuntary horror, which completely stupefied her, as these impassioned exclamations fell upon her ears: and vainly—vainly did she endeavour to reply.

Arthur rose, and seating himself by her side on the sofa, passed his arm around her slender waist, and drawing her gently towards him, said in a subdued tone, “From this day forth, beloved Georgiana, you must have no secrets unknown to me. Confide in me as your best and sincerest friend—and the tenderest sympathy shall flow from my heart to solace you in those moments of melancholy which no mortal, however prosperously placed, can hope altogether to avoid. In the society of a husband who will never cease to love you—whose constant care shall be to ensure your felicity—and whose unwearied attention shall be devoted to the promotion of your happiness, your life will be spent in an atmosphere into which a cloud shall seldom intrude. Oh! what pictures of perfect bliss present themselves to my imagination!”

The enamoured nobleman pressed the fair one closer to his breast, as he thus poured forth his soul with all the ardour of his sincere and devoted love; and she—in spite of herself,—bewildered, stupefied, intoxicated as she was by the suddenness with which this scene had been brought about,—she gazed with mingled rapture and surprise upon that handsome countenance which the glow of inward passion and ineffable joy now rendered still more expressive.

She felt as if the hysterical shriek, which for some moments past had threatened to burst from her lips, were subdued—stifled by some unknown power, whose influence was strangely sweet and consoling:—her soul almost sickened in the bliss of that love by which she was surrounded, and to which her woman's heart could not do otherwise than respond.

Then, again, she felt as if she must start from his arms—reject his love—dash down that chalice of honied happiness from which they both were drinking deep draughts—and proclaim to him that it was all a hideous mistake—that she had never consented to receive him as her husband—that her uncle had committed a fearful error—and that they must separate, never, never again to meet!

But at the very moment when she was about to do all this, Arthur drew her nearer to him;—his breath, sweet as that of flowers, fell on her burning cheek—his hand pressed hers—she found herself linked to him in heart by a spell which no mortal courage could at such a moment have broken—then she caught herself looking into his fine eyes, and reading the thrilling language of love that was written there—and in another moment their lips met in one long and delicious kiss.

“Sweet Georgiana, I adore you!” murmured Arthur, his glances speaking more eloquently than his words. “And now there breathes not a happier man on the earth's wide surface than I. Say, Georgiana—say, does not that happiness which I myself experience impart pleasure to you? Could you now do aught to torture my soul again with the agony of suspense—with the despair of baffled hope? Believe me, my dearest angel, that if destiny, in its malignant spite, were now to separate us—if tomorrow I came and found you gone, or here but cold and altered,—in a word, if any impediment

were to arise to the accomplishment of our union, I should not survive the blow! As a distracted maniac should I be borne to a mad-cell—or, if my reason were left me, my grave would be stained with a suicide's blood!"

Georgiana was appalled by this terrible announcement; and in the agony of feeling which it excited within her, she cast a glance of profound tenderness upon the Earl, unwittingly pressing his hand at the same time.

"Oh! now I know that you entertain the same sentiments as myself," he cried, mistaking those convulsive movements on her part for the tender evidences of love: "now I know that your heart beats in unison with mine. Oh! thrice happy day—the happiest that I ever yet have known. And happier does it seem, too, because it has dissipated so much previous anxiety—healed so much acutely-felt pain. Yes—dearest Georgiana—I am almost glad that you rejected my suit the other day; for the wretched feelings of the interval have, by contrast, made the present moment indescribably sweet. And shall I tell you, my beloved one, that I am now acquainted with the nature of that secret—"

"That secret!" cried Georgiana, with a cold shudder—which Ellingham did not perceive, for at the moment he pressed her fondly towards him.

"Yes, dearest," he continued: "I know all the power which that secret influence must occasionally have over you: and, believe me when I declare that—instead of being any longer annoyed at the fact of that circumstance having induced you to refuse my hand the other day—I deeply sympathise with you! And if I now allude to that event—that incident which years ago, at your late father's country-residence in Hampshire—"

A short convulsive sob burst from Georgiana's breast.

"Oh! pardon me—pardon me, beloved one!" cried the Earl, again imprinting a kiss upon her lips: "I know that I was wrong to allude to an event which you can never entirely forget. But if I mentioned it ere now—it was for the first and the last time—and merely to convince you that he, whom you will soon receive as your husband, is aware of that secret influence which holds a sway over your mind; and that he implores you to forget it—to abandon yourself only to the thoughts of that happiness which our love and our brilliant social position must ensure us. And now, my dearest Georgiana, no more on that head: never again let the topic enter into our discourse—never let us allude to it, even by a single syllable!"

"Oh! generous—excellent-hearted—noble-minded man," exclaimed Georgiana; "and is your love for me indeed so strong as this?"

"Can you doubt it, dearest?" said the Earl. "If so—tell me how I can prove its sincerity?"

"Have you not given me a proof the most convincing that man can give to woman?" asked Lady Hatfield, concealing her blushing countenance on Arthur's breast. "Are you not content to receive as your wife one who—"

"No more—no more!" exclaimed the Earl, tenderly hushing her words with kisses. "Have we not agreed never again to allude to that topic?"

"But one word, Arthur," said Georgiana: "only one word! Who could have acquainted you—"

"Your uncle, dearest," answered Lord Ellingham;—"that excellent man who has been mainly

instrumental in procuring me the happiness which I now enjoy!"

"My uncle!" murmured Lady Hatfield, her soul subdued with astonishment of the most overwhelming nature.

But the Earl's ears caught not the repetition of his answer; neither did he notice the effect which it produced upon Georgiana;—for her head was pillowed upon his breast—his hand clasped hers—her fine form leant against him—and he had no thought save of the pure but intoxicating happiness which he now enjoyed.

Oh, Love! thou art the sweetest charm of life—the dearest solace in this sphere of trial and vicissitude—the sentiment that, shining on us as a star, adds the most refulgent brightness to our lot. Ambition never imparted consolation to the breaking spirit, and places no curb on the wild passions and insatiable vices which too often dominate the human heart. Wealth makes its possessor envied, but also encourages the daring of the robber, or sharpens the knife of the murderer who seeks to grasp it. Honours engender hatred in the breasts of those who once were friends. Pleasure is bought by gold, and must be paid for over and over again by the health. Genius is a consuming fire: like the spur to the gallant steed, it urges its votary on, but draws the life-blood in the act. Glory is the eruption of the volcano—bright, majestic, and resplendent to gaze upon—yet bearing death in its halo. But thou, O Love! art the star which beams brighter as the gloom of this cold and selfish world becomes darker:—thou art the sunshine of the soul—teaching man to emulate the gentleness, the resignation, and the holy devotion of woman—and raising woman but one remove from the nature of angels!

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. FRANK CURTIS'S PLEASANT ADVENTURE

ABOUT half an hour previous to the visit of Lord Ellingham, Mr. Frank Curtis was lounging along Piccadilly with a swell-mob kind of ease and a Bagnigge Wells' independence, when a young female, of good figure and pretty face, attracted his notice.

As he was proceeding in one way, and she in another, they passed each other; and, Mr. Curtis having nothing to do, it struck him that he would endeavour to scrape an acquaintance with the young person alluded to.

He accordingly turned round—hesitated for a moment how to devise an excuse for addressing himself to her—and then, drawing forth his own white cambric pocket-handkerchief, hurried after the object of his interest.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," he said, tapping her gently upon the shoulder; "but I think you dropped this handkerchief."

The young female immediately replied in the negative; but a smile played upon her lips, and her blue eyes assumed an arch expression, implying that she fully saw through the young man's trick, which was indeed transparent enough.

"I really thought it was yours, Miss," exclaimed Curtis, by no means abashed. "But if it is n't—why, I must keep it till I find the owner—that's all."

"I rather think it is with the owner now, sir," answered the young woman.

"Well, my dear," said Frank, "I see you suspect my stratagem. But you are such a sweet pretty creature, that I was resolved to introduce myself to you. Now do n't be angry, my love: I mean all I assert—and if you will only tell me where and when I can see you again, I'm sure you won't be sorry to make my acquaintance."

"Upon my word!" cried the young woman, in that dubious manner which might have meant disgust, or which might be taken as encouragement.

Mr. Curtis, strong in his self-conceit, adopted the latter view, and became more pressing in his attentions.

"Now do let me see you again, there's a dear," he exclaimed, continuing to walk by her side. "If you'll only agree to meet me this evening, I'll take you to the play—and I'll buy you a gold chain. Money is no object to me, my love: a man with ten thousand a-year—and a peerage in the perspective—may indulge his little fancies, I hope."

These falsehoods, conveyed by implication, were uttered in such a tone of assurance, that the young woman was evidently dazzled by their splendour; and she threw a rapid, but encouraging glance towards the mendacious Frank.

"Come, now—will you meet me again?" he demanded. "I was going over to stay a few days with the Prime Minister of France early next month; and I had promised to pass my Christmas with his Holiness the Pope at Rome:—but if you was only kind, now—why, there's no saying that I might not send excuses to both of them, and stay in London for the pleasure of seeing you."

"But you men are such gay deceivers," said the young female.

"Well—we may be—sometimes!" ejaculated Frank, rather looking upon the imputation as a compliment than a reproach. "But you're too pretty for a man to find it in his heart to deceive you, my dear. In one word, where shall you be at seven o'clock this evening?"

"I *did* think of calling upon a friend which is lady's-maid in a family living in Conduit Street," replied the young woman.

"And if your friend is a lady's-maid, my dear," said Frank, "what may you be?"

"The same, sir," was the answer.

"The very thing!" cried Curtis. "If there's one class of young ladies that I like more than another, it is the ladies'-maids. Why, my dear, when I left Paris—where I stayed some time with the Archbishop of that city,—for his Grace and I are as thick as two thieves—the ladies'-maids held a meeting, and appointed a committee to draw up an address expressive of regret and all that sort of thing at my going away. They did, upon my honour! But let us come to the point, my dear. Shall you be in Conduit Street this evening at about seven?"

"I think it's very likely, sir," was the answer. "But you must not go with me any farther now—for I live at the house with the bay-windows there."

"But whose service are you in, my dear?" asked Frank.

"In Lady Georgiana Hatfield's," replied the young woman.

"Indeed!" cried Curtis. "I've heard an uncle of mine speak of her ladyship, I think. But this is a great nuisance, though."

"What is?" asked Charlotte, whom our readers may remember to have been mentioned at the opening of this tale.

"Why—that you and me must separate just at the moment that we are getting so friendly together—and without a single kiss, either."

Charlotte giggled—but said nothing.

"You will really be in Conduit Street this evening, my dear?" urged Frank Curtis, after a brief pause.

"I think I shall be able to get out," responded Charlotte. "But her ladyship is an invalid; and Miss Mordaunt—her friend, or companion, or whatever she is—may want me to dress her for some ball or party; and so I cannot promise for sure."

"But you will try?"

"Yes," murmured the young woman; and she hurried on to the front-door of Lady Hatfield's house.

Curtis stopped at a short distance and watched her as she tripped along, her pretty feet and ankles peering from beneath the folds of her dress.

Now it happened that at the very moment when Charlotte was about to ring the bell, the front-door opened, and a livery-servant issued forth, doubtless upon some errand. After exchanging a word or two with Charlotte, he passed on, and the young woman entered the house. But ere she closed the door she turned a sly glance upon Frank Curtis, who, the instant he saw the livery-servant make his appearance, sauntered very leisurely along in the most innocent-looking manner in the world.

The livery-servant was now out of sight—and the pretty face of the lady's-maid lingered at the door which she kept ajar.

Curtis looked hastily around; and, the coast being tolerably clear at the moment, he darted up to the entrance.

Charlotte had merely remained on the threshold to give him a parting glance of intelligence for the purpose of assuring him of the sincerity of her promise that she would endeavour to meet him in the evening,—for the young lady was of an intriguing disposition, and flattered herself that she had captivated some very great, or at all events some very wealthy person:—but, when she saw him thus precipitately rush towards the entrance, she drew back and endeavoured to shut the door.

Frank was, however, too quick for her: and he fairly thrust himself into the hall, closing the street-door behind him.

"For God's sake, go away, sir," said Charlotte imploringly.

"Not till I have had one kiss—just one," cried Frank; and he threw his arms round the lady's-maid's neck.

"Oh! do let me go, sir—the servants will come—and I shall be ruined," she murmured, vainly struggling with the young man, who not only considered the adventure a capital joke, but was also excited by his present contact with a pretty girl.

He glued his lips to hers, and pressed her closely to him, when a loud double-knock suddenly echoed through the hall.

"Good heavens! what shall I do?" exclaimed Charlotte, in a tone of despair: then, in another moment, she recovered her presence of mind, and throwing open a side-door, said in a rapid and earnest tone, "Go in there, sir—and, if any one comes, pray invent some excuse for your being here—but do n't compromise me."

Curtis darted into the parlour with which the side-door communicated: the lady's-maid hurried away; and old Mason speedily made his appearance to answer the summons conveyed by the double-knock.

"Is Miss Mordaunt at home?" inquired a voice which Curtis, who was listening anxiously on the inner side of the parlour door, immediately recognised to be that of his worthy uncle.

"Yes, Sir Christopher—Miss Mordaunt is at home," replied Mason. "Please to walk in, sir. This way, sir—Miss Mordaunt is with Lady Hatfield in the drawing-room."

"I wish to see Miss Mordaunt alone, if you please," said Sir Christopher. "Give my compliments, and if Miss Mordaunt will accord me a few minutes—upon some little matter of a private nature—"

"Certainly, Sir Christopher," responded the domestic. "Have the goodness to step into this room, sir."

And Frank Curtis—now as miserable as he was insolent and exulting a few moments previously, when embracing Charlotte in the hall—heard the footsteps of Mason and his uncle approaching the very door at which he was listening.

Not a moment was to be lost. He was too much confused—too much bewildered to think of meeting the embarrassment of his position with a good face and a bold excuse: and concealment instantly suggested itself to his coward-mind.

A cheerful fire was burning in the grate; and near it was drawn a sofa, the cushion of which had rich fringes that hung all round, and drooped nearly to the carpet. To thrust himself beneath this friendly sofa was the work of an instant with Frank Curtis; and so rapidly was the manœuvre executed, that the fringes had even ceased to rustle, when Sir Christopher Blunt stalked pompously into the apartment.

Mason withdrew to deliver the knight's message to Miss Mordaunt; and in the meantime the knight himself paced the room in somewhat an agitated manner.

At length he walked straight up to a handsome mirror, and looking fully at his image as it was reflected in the glass, began to apostrophise himself.

"Sir Christopher Blunt—Sir Christopher Blunt," he exclaimed aloud, in a solemn tone, "what is it that you are about to do? Are you taking a wise, or an imprudent step? Are you, in a word, about to ensure your own happiness, or—or—to make a damned old fool of yourself?"

Frank Curtis was astounded at this language which came from the lips of his uncle. Despite of his fears and the unpleasant predicament in which he found himself, he was on the point of yielding to his natural propensity for mischief and blurting forth an affirmative response to the latter portion of the knight's self-interrogation, when the door opened and a lady entered the room.

Curtis accordingly held his peace, and his breath too as much as he could; for his curiosity was now so intense as to master even his fears.

"Miss Mordaunt," said the knight, suddenly turning away from the glass and advancing as jauntily as his passive frame would permit, to meet the lady, "I have to apologise for this early visit—"

"Oh! no apology, Sir Christopher," exclaimed Julia, in a most affable manner. "Pray be seated."

"Allow me," said the knight; and taking her hand, he led her to the very sofa beneath which his nephew lay concealed. Then, seating himself at a respectful distance from her—but also on the sofa, he continued thus:—"I hope, Miss Mordaunt, that I shall not offend you with what I am going—that is, with what I am about—I mean, with what I am on the point of—"

"Very intelligible, all this!" thought Frank Curtis to himself.

"Sir Christopher Blunt is incapable of offending a lady—especially a young one," observed Miss Julia, blushing in the most approved style on such interesting occasions—for she could anticipate what was coming.

"Sir Christopher Blunt thanks you for that compliment, Miss Mordaunt," said the knight pompously, and encouraged also by the lady's tone and manner. "Yes—I am indeed incapable of giving offence wilfully; although there are certain vulgar people east of Temple Bar who pretend that I treat them cavalierly. And, thank heaven! Miss Mordaunt, I was not elected Alderman of Portsoken; for I never could have put up with all the filthy guzzling and swilling—excuse the expressions, ma'am—that seem inseparable from City affairs. You know, perhaps, Miss Mordaunt, that my origin was humble—I may say that it was nothing at all. But I glory in that fact: it is my boast—my pride."

"True merit is sure to force its way in the world, Sir Christopher," observed Julia, with a smile which, displaying her white teeth, quite enchanted the amorous knight.

"Again I thank you for the good opinion of me implied by that remark," he said, edging himself a little closer to the lady. "My large fortune—for large it notoriously is, Miss Mordaunt—has all been acquired by my own honest industry; and the title which I have the honour to bear, was bestowed upon me by a gracious Prince in approbation of my conduct as a public officer."

"You occupy an enviable position in society, Sir Christopher," said Julia.

"Do you really think so, Miss?" asked the knight, endeavouring to assume a soft and plaintive tone, but with as little success as if he were a boatswain labouring under a severe cold: "do you really think so?"—and again he edged himself nearer to his companion. "Ah! my dear Miss Mordaunt, how happy should I be to lay my fortune—my title—my all, at the feet of some charming lady, who, like yourself, would not despise the man that has risen by his own honest exertions to I may say affluence and honour."

Miss Mordaunt cast down her eyes and worked herself up into a most interesting state of blushing excitement; while Sir Christopher boldly took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

The knight's foot was thrust some little way under the sofa; and as he wore blucher boots, it was not difficult to stick a pin into the calf of his leg, if any one had felt so disposed. Such an idea certainly struck his dutiful nephew at that instant; for Mr. Frank Curtis now fully comprehended the object of his uncle's visit to Miss Julia Mordaunt; and the matrimonial designs of the said uncle foreboded any thing but essential benefit to himself. Then—although he was not the brightest young man in existence—the selfish motive of Sir Chris-

topher, in agreeing to purchase Mr. Torrens's elder daughter as his (Frank's) wife, flashed upon his mind; and in an instant he comprehended the entire policy of Sir Christopher as well as the reader already understands it, with regard to the recent matrimonial speculation, which Tom Rainford had so materially aided to render abortive.

We digressed just at the point where Sir Christopher was venturesome enough to press the hand of Miss Mordaunt to his lips.

"Oh! Sir Christopher," murmured the lady, apparently quite abashed, and forgetting, most probably in the agitation of the moment, to withdraw her fair fingers.

"Julia, my love—for so you must now permit me to call you," exclaimed the enamoured knight, "will my suit be rejected? can you receive it favourably? At this moment you see before you a man whom it is in your power to render happy or miserable for life. And, ah! dear me—what a dreadful dream I had last night! It was that dream which made me come to you so early to-day, to know your decision. For whether it was your image, my beloved Julia—or the cold roast pig that I eat for supper, I'm sure I can't say; but true it is that—Oh!" screamed the knight, in a fit of agony.

"My dear Sir Christopher, what—what is the matter?" asked Miss Mordaunt, alarmed by the sudden ejaculation, which was accompanied by an equally sudden start.

"Oh! nothing—nothing," said the knight, endeavouring to compose himself: "a sudden twitch in the leg—just like the pricking of a pin—but it is nothing—a mere sensation! I was going to tell you, my dear Julia, about that horrid dream—"

"Pray, Sir Christopher, don't tell me any thing about horrid dreams," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt: "you will frighten me out of my wits."

"Well, dearest, I will not. But you have not told me yet whether I may consider that this fair hand which I now press to my lips—Oh!"

And again the knight started violently.

"What is the matter, Sir Christopher?" asked Julia earnestly.

"Really—I can't make it out—I don't know—but this is the second time that the same sensation has seized me in the left leg," stammered the knight: "just for all the world like the pricking of a pin. And yet of course it cannot be that. But pray, pardon these unpleasant interruptions, Julia; and relieve me from suspense at once. Say—tell me, dearest one—will you, will you consent to be mine?"

"Oh! Sir Christopher, what do you ask?" murmured Miss Mordaunt, as if there were any thing extraordinary or unexpected in the question.

"What do I ask?" repeated the enamoured knight: "I ask you to bestow upon me this fair hand."

"How can I refuse you, Sir Christopher?" sighed the lady. "You are so killing!"

"Am I, dearest!" ejaculated the knight; and, encouraged more than ever by this assurance, he boldly kissed his companion. But almost immediately a cry of agony burst from his lips; and, starting up from the sofa, he exclaimed, "My leg! my leg! the—the devil's in it—and that's the fact!"

The fact was however somewhat different; for Mr. Frank Curtis, having very quietly and delibe-

rately taken his breast-pin from the frill of his shirt, was amusing himself with the very pleasant pastime of thrusting the point into his uncle's leg.

On the third occasion of the application of the aforesaid breast-pin, Sir Christopher started up and danced about the room, while Miss Mordaunt, who was most anxious to bring the delicate topic of discourse to such a point that she might satisfy herself as to the very day on which she was to change her condition, endeavoured to her utmost to console him.

Convinced that the pain he experienced could be nothing more than some sudden but very galling spasmodic attack, neither Sir Christopher nor Julia entertained the least thought of looking beneath the sofa: they therefore re-seated themselves upon it, and continued their tender discourse.

"And when shall it be?" asked Sir Christopher, taking it for granted that it was to be.

"Whenever—that is—so soon—I mean—when you choose," murmured Miss Mordaunt. "But you will communicate your intentions to my brother, who obtained his captaincy a few days ago, and whom I must consult."

"And why consult him?" asked Sir Christopher, a misgiving entering his mind.

"Oh! he might—I do not say that he will—but he might object," answered Miss Mordaunt.

"Then perhaps you wish me to state my views to my nephew also," said the knight somewhat testily: "as he might also object."

"But a nephew, Sir Christopher," urged the lady,—"a nephew is not a brother."

"Very true," replied Blunt, as if some grand truth had just been made apparent to him. "And yet it appears, Julia," he added, in a coaxing tone, "that we have each a relation to whom we would rather not mention the matter—until after it was over."

"Oh! you killing man—what would you have me understand by that remark?" cried Miss Mordaunt.

"Simply that we should—"

"Should what, dear Sir Christopher?"

"Should be married privately—or run away to Grotna Green," answered the knight. "And now the truth is out."

"Oh! naughty—naughty man!" exclaimed Julia, casting on her swain one of her most bewitching smiles: but at the same time she imagined to herself all the excitement attending a run-a-way match to Grotna—the rapidity of travelling—the bustle that would be excited at the way-side inns—the sensation that must arise in the fashionable world—the paragraphs in the newspapers—the *éclat* attached to such a proceeding—and the importance with which her reappearance in town, after the union, would be attended:—of all this she thought—and the knight's proposal was therefore most welcome to her; for, while she contemplated the agreeable side of the picture, she never once reflected on the ridicule and absurdity that must attach themselves to such a step on the part of two persons of the respective ages of Sir Christopher Blunt and herself.

"Well, dearest, what are you thinking of?" asked the knight.

"Of what you were saying, dear Sir Christopher," murmured the lady in a languishing tone.

"Then, how shall it be! a private marriage—or Grotna?"

"The arrangements for a private marriage might be suspected," sighed Julia, casting down her eyes

and managing a blush, which was respectable enough, seeing that it scarcely came voluntarily to her aid.

"Just my opinion!" ejaculated Sir Christopher. "I would not have that prying nephew of mine, Frank Curtis—the young scapegrace—getting a hint of it beforehand, for any money."

"Nor would I wish my brother to know of it until it is all over, dear Sir Christopher," returned Julia.

"Then be it Greta!" exclaimed the knight. "And now when shall it take place?"

"I could not say to-day, Sir Christopher—but to-morrow—to-morrow—" murmured the lady in a faint tone, as if quite overpowered by the importance of the step she was about to take, but which she would willingly have taken long before, had the proposal been made to her:—"to-morrow," she added, "I shall be prepared—to—"

"I understand you, my angel," interrupted the knight; and this time he caught the lady fairly in his arms and subjected her to a process of hearty kissing.

Mr. Frank Curtis had in the meantime restored his breast-pin to the frill of his shirt; for, since the conversation had turned upon a regular elopement, the matter had become far too serious for him to trifle with. He suddenly found himself menaced with something bordering on total disinheritance in respect to his uncle's property; for, even if this projected union should yield no issue, still the lady might obtain so much influence over the knight as to induce him to will all his fortune to herself. Frank was therefore in rather an unpleasant state of mind, as well as being in an uneasy predicament under the sofa. He nevertheless saw that cunning must be met with cunning; and he now lay as quiet as a mouse, in order to avoid detection. But he vowed seriously that the moment he should escape from the kind of prison in which he found himself, he would not let the grass grow under his feet ere he adopted measures to defeat the matrimonial scheme of Sir Christopher Blunt and Miss Julia Mordaunt.

At length, to his unspeakable relief, the knight took his leave of Miss Mordaunt, after having settled the hour and place where they were to meet on the following evening.

Sir Christopher being gone, Julia also left the room; and poor Charlotte, who had been on the tenter-hooks of suspense and alarm ever since Frank Curtis had first entered the house, now hurried to the parlour, wondering how he could possibly have managed to avoid an exposure.

But when she entered the room, and perceived no one, she was more astonished still.

Her surprise was not, however, of long duration; for Curtis, having peeped through the fringe and ascertained who the new-comer was, suddenly emerged from his hiding-place.

"Oh! dear me, sir," exclaimed the young woman, "what a fright I have been in, to be sure!"

"And what a pickle I have been in!" cried Frank sulkily.

"You cannot say that it was my fault, sir," observed Charlotte reproachfully.

"Nor more I do, my dear," answered Curtis, warming himself into a better humour by means of a kiss or two on the lady's-maid's red lips. "But, I say, my dear," he continued, after a few moments'

dalliance of that sort, "you *must* come to meet me this evening; because, independent of my desire to chat with you and all that sort of thing, you can be of service to me."

"Lor! sir," cried Charlotte, astonished at this intimation.

"Indeed you can: but I must not stay to explain myself now," returned Curtis. "Here, my dear—take these five guineas as an earnest of what I will do for you; and mind and be punctual in Conduit Street at seven o'clock this evening."

"I shall not fail, sir," replied Charlotte.

"And in the meantime," added Frank, "watch Miss Mordaunt well. Don't ask me any questions now—I will tell you all about it this evening. But mind you watch her; and if possible, get into conversation with her. Should she ask you to do her any service—no matter of what kind—promise her that you will; and leave the rest to me. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir—and I will do as you tell me," was the answer.

"Well, then—that's right," said Curtis. "And now let me see if I can't slip out without running plump up against one of your liveried flunkies here."

"Wait an instant," cried Charlotte; and she disappeared from the room, closing the door carefully behind her.

In a few moments she returned, with the welcome tidings that the coast was clear; and Frank Curtis succeeded in quitting Lady Hatfield's house without being perceived by any one save the faithful Charlotte.

CHAPTER XX

HAPPINESS.—THE DIAMOND-MERCHANT.

WHEN Lord Ellingham took his leave of Lady Hatfield, the latter hurried to her bed-chamber; and, locking the door behind her, sat down in an arm-chair near the fire to ponder unconstrainedly upon the conversation of the previous hour.

And that hour—what changes had it worked in respect to the mind and prospects of this patrician lady!

"Oh! how generous and noble-hearted is my Arthur!" she mused inwardly: "how boundless is his love for me! But is it possible that I am really to become his wife? or am I the sport of a wild and delusive dream? No—it is all true: I am awake—I see the various objects around me—there is no confusion in my brain. Yes—it is all true; and he will marry me—he will make me his wife—in spite of—But let me avoid thinking of the past! The future is now bright and glorious before me. My own Arthur—whom I love so fondly, and who alone has ever possessed and will possess my heart,—my own noble, generous Arthur has surmounted all prejudice—flung aside all disgust—and has promised to make me happy! Oh! not in the wildest of my dreams could I have imagined so much bliss. The clouds which have so long hung heavily around the star of my destiny, have been suddenly dispersed by one who views my heart aright—who understands me—who knows my sad history, but recognises my innocence—who, in a word, rises superior to all the prejudices which shackle the world. Oh! dearest"

—dearest Arthur! how can I ever reward you adequately for this generosity on your part? All the love which I bear you—all the adoration I feel for you—all the devotion I shall manifest towards you, will not repay the immense debt that I owe you! It is true that I possess great wealth—that the services of my father to the State induced his Majesty to create me a Peeress in my own right—and that I have some pretensions to beauty:—all this is true—but it is not sufficient to induce my noble-hearted Arthur to make me the partner of his bed. No: for he himself is rich far beyond his desires—he also owns a proud and ancient name—and England has daughters far lovelier than I. But he loves me for myself—apart from all selfish considerations: and, Oh! what bliss to be thus loved!”

Lady Hatfield sank her head upon her fair hand, and gave way to the new and ineffable bliss which had so suddenly enveloped her in its halo.

At length another idea struck her.

“But my uncle—how could he have known my secret?” she exclaimed aloud. “And how did he discover it? Oh! he must have been aware of it from the very first! The good—the kind-hearted man—never to have even appeared to—”

Georgiana’s reverie was interrupted by a hasty knock at her door.

She rose, unlocked it, and gave admission to her friend Julia.

“My dear Lady Hatfield,” exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, her entire countenance illuminated with joy, “congratulate me. It is all settled!”

“That you are to become Lady Blunt?” asked Georgiana, smiling.

“Yes, my dearest friend—Lady Blunt! How well it sounds! only think of ‘*Lady Blunt*’ upon a card—printed, for instance, in the old English letter—or German text—or whatever it is. And then—‘*Lady Blunt’s carriage*!’—and all that sort of thing! Really I am so happy—I don’t know whether to dance or sing—or both!”

“I am delighted to see you so happy, my dear Julia,” said Lady Hatfield; “and most sincerely do I congratulate you. But have you acted prudently to accept Sir Christopher without communicating his proposal to your relations?”

“I think that I am quite old enough to manage my own affairs in this respect at least,” answered Julia, laughing: “and yet—after all—I am not so very old—only just thirty. Still it is high time to settle one-self in life. But for the present, my dear Lady Hatfield, I must implore you to keep my engagement a profound secret—for reasons which I will explain in a few days—”

“I shall keep your secret, Julia, without seeking to learn your motives until you may choose to communicate them,” replied Georgiana. “And now I am about to surprise you in respect to myself. Lord Ellingham has been here this morning.”

“So I heard from old Mason just now,” said Miss Mordaunt. “But you knew he would call, my dear friend, after leaving his card last night. And—if you speak candidly—you will confess that you *hoped* he would.”

“I *did* hope he would call, Julia,” answered Georgiana; “but I could not imagine that our interview would have terminated—However,” she added, checking herself, and smiling joyously, “you must now congratulate me; for in a few weeks I shall become the Countess of Ellingham.”

“I do indeed congratulate you, my dearest Lady Hatfield,” replied Miss Mordaunt. “But upon my word, wonders will never cease. Here were you only a few days ago rejecting the Earl in opposition to every thing like common sense—and certainly against the wishes of your very best friends—”

“Let us not talk of the past, Julia,” interrupted Georgiana. “The future opens so brightly before me, that I am almost dazzled by its brilliancy. And I am happy—supremely happy—Oh! almost too happy!”

As she uttered these words, Georgiana threw herself into the arm-chair which she had quitted for the purpose of giving admission to Miss Mordaunt; and never did the beauty of her soul-speaking countenance shine to greater advantage than at that moment.

And no wonder that even her friend, whose volatile disposition seldom permitted her mind to settle its attention on subjects concerning another, was struck by the loveliness of Lady Hatfield on this occasion:—no wonder, we say, that Julia gazed with admiration for a long time on that beautiful woman: for happiness seemed to have invested her with new charms.

Her cheeks—lately so pale with mental anxiety and partial indisposition—were now tinged with a warm carnation hue:—joy flashed from her large liquid eyes, usually of so mild though lustrous a languor:—and smiles played upon those rosy lips which were wont to remain apart with serious expression.

* * * * *

The Earl of Ellingham, upon taking leave of Georgiana that morning,—but, be it well understood, with the promise of returning to pass an hour or two in the evening,—experienced that kind of heart-felt happiness which requires a vent by means of imparting the fact of its existence to a friend.

To the abode of Dr. Lascellas was the Earl accordingly hastening, when he was suddenly accosted by a gentleman, who addressed him by name, and whom in another moment he remembered to be Mr. Gordon, the diamond-merchant.

“I beg your lordship’s pardon for thus stopping you,” said that individual: “but I thought you might be gratified to learn that the jewels which I lost so mysteriously, have been restored to me.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Arthur. “I am rejoiced to hear these tidings. And now, I presume, you are fully convinced that Miss Esther de Medina was entirely innocent of the theft so ridiculously imputed to her.”

“On the contrary, my lord,” answered the diamond-merchant: “I am more than ever certain that Miss de Medina was the person who took them.”

“Mr. Gordon,” exclaimed the Earl indignantly, “I should have thought that, after the investigation which took place at the office in Bow Street, you would not have clung to an opinion so dishonourable—so unjust towards an innocent young lady. Moreover, sir, I should have conceived that my testimony to that young lady’s character would have dispelled any doubts which had still hung on your mind.”

“That your lordship gave such testimony conscientiously, I cannot for an instant question,” was the firm but respectful answer. “At the same time



that your lordship was and is still deceived in that young lady, I am confident."

"Perhaps, sir," observed the Earl coldly, "you will have no objection to communicate the reasons which have thus induced you to change your opinion; for, if I remember rightly, you yourself declared, in the public office, that you were satisfied there was some grievous mistake, and that Miss de Medina was innocent of the deed imputed to her at first."

"I admit, my lord," replied the diamond-merchant, "that I was staggered by the singularity of the turn given to the proceedings when your lordship appeared to speak in Miss de Medina's defence. But listen, my lord, to the subsequent events which revived all my suspicions. Upon leaving the police-court I returned home, but was scarcely able to attend to my business, so bewildered was I by the occurrence of the morning, and so annoyed was I also at the loss which I had so mysteriously experienced. It was probably four o'clock in the afternoon, when a lady was announced; and the moment she raised her veil, I recognised Miss de Medina. You may conceive, my lord, how surprised I was by this visit: but

much greater was my astonishment, when she said to me, without a single word of preface, '*Sir, what is the value of the diamonds which you have lost?*'—'*Six hundred pounds,*' was my answer.—Miss de Medina immediately drew forth a small packet from her dress, and counted six bank-notes, each of a hundred pounds, and which she placed before me on the table.—'*Here is the amount, sir,*' she said; and I offered her a receipt, which she however declined. For a few moments she lingered—as if anxious to say something more; then, suddenly turning away, she abruptly quitted the house."

"Extraordinary!" cried the Earl of Ellingham. "And yet—"

"One instant, my lord," interrupted Mr. Gordon: "the most mysterious part of the whole transaction is yet to be revealed to you. Not ten minutes had elapsed from the moment of Miss de Medina's departure, when a person, whom I remembered to have seen in the court, was announced. I do not know whether you observed at the office a man of florid complexion—light curly hair—red whiskers—and dressed in a sporting suit—"

"I not only observed him," replied the Earl;

"but from the description subsequently given by one of my servants, whom I questioned after my return home from the police-office, I have every reason to believe that the individual whom you describe was the bearer of a letter which had induced me to hasten to Bow Street to give my testimony in proof of Miss de Medina's innocence."

"And does your lordship know that man?" inquired the diamond-merchant.

"I never saw him, to my knowledge, until that day, when the attention he appeared to devote to the proceedings attracted my notice—although he was in the midst of the crowd congregated near the door. But please to continue your own narrative."

"This individual, my lord, of whom we have been speaking," returned Mr. Gordon, "was the person introduced to my office a few minutes after the departure of Miss de Medina. He seated himself in a free and easy, off-hand manner, and said, '*I think I can give you some little information concerning the diamonds which you have lost.*'—'*Indeed!*' I exclaimed: and, anxious to hear what he was about to state, I said nothing relative to the visit of Miss de Medina and the payment of the amount at which the lost jewels were valued.—'*Yes,*' he continued: and, with the utmost coolness, he produced a pistol from one pocket and a small parcel, wrapped up in brown paper, from the other.—'*What is the meaning of this strange conduct?*' I demanded, glancing towards the weapon which the man held in his hand.—'*Oh! it is soon explained,*' he said. '*This pistol is merely to defend myself in case you should take it into your head to give me into the charge of a constable on suspicion of being connected with the person who stole your property: and as for the parcel, open it, and see what it contains.*'—Thus speaking, he tossed the packet across the table to me, crossed his legs, and began to hum a tune. I opened the parcel; and to my surprise perceived the diamonds which I had lost.—'*Is the set complete?*' asked the man.—'*Quite perfect,*' I replied in the most unfeigned astonishment at the singularity of the whole proceedings. '*But how does it happen,*' I continued, '*that you have come to restore them to me, when a quarter of an hour has scarcely elapsed since Miss de Medina herself called and paid me six hundred pounds at which they are valued?*'—It now appeared to be the man's turn to be surprised: but, in another moment, he exclaimed, '*Oh! I understand it all.*'—'*What do you understand?*' said I: '*for I must candidly confess that I understand nothing of the whole transaction, which is one involved in the deepest mystery.*'—'*So let it remain,*' he cried abruptly: '*and now mark me,*' he added in a slower and more impressive tone; '*beware how you ever utter a word derogatory to the honour of Esther de Medina.*' And he quitted the apartment, leaving me in possession of my jewels and of the six hundred pounds also."

"This narrative is so singular, Mr. Gordon," said the Earl of Ellingham, "that were you not a respectable merchant, and that you can have no possible interest in amusing me with a fiction, I should not believe the portion which relates to Miss de Medina."

"I declare before my Maker," ejaculated the diamond-merchant solemnly, "that I have not exaggerated one tittle of my history. I have even more to state. The restoration of my property convinced me that I had no right to retain the money which

Miss de Medina had paid to me as a recompense for its loss. I therefore determined to give it back to her. But I was unacquainted with her residence. Then I recollected that your lordship had stated that Mr. de Medina had become your tenant for a house and small estate about seven miles from London. I immediately repaired to your lordship's residence in Pall Mall to inquire the address of Mr. de Medina; but you were not at home. Your valet, however, furnished me with the information I required; and on the following morning I proceeded to Finchley. I called at the house to which I had been directed, and learnt that Mr. de Medina and his daughter did not intend to settle there until the Spring; but from the servant in charge of the premises I ascertained where Mr. de Medina resided in town. I accordingly returned to London, and forthwith repaired to Great Ormond Street, where I obtained an interview with Miss de Medina. Her father was out—a circumstance which, on the occasion, appeared to give her pleasure; because she asked the servant who announced me, whether Mr. de Medina were in his study; and on receiving a reply to the effect that he had gone out a few minutes previous to my arrival, she was evidently relieved of some anxiety. I communicated the nature of my business; but when I mentioned the particulars of the visit I had received from the light-haired gentleman, her countenance suddenly assumed so singular an expression that I can scarcely define its meaning. It was not alarm alone—nor surprise—nor shame—nor sorrow, which her looks denoted; but a feeling composed of all those sentiments blended together. Then, when I explained to her that this man had restored my lost diamonds, her countenance suddenly assumed an expression of joy. I handed her the six hundred pounds, which she received; and then—as on the occasion of her visit to me the preceding evening—she seemed anxious to make some remark, to which she could not, however, give utterance. The silence became awkward—and I took my leave. Your lordship now knows all."

"And can you for one moment imagine that Esther de Medina was the person who stole your diamonds?" exclaimed Lord Ellingham: "or that she was in any way connected with that man who restored them to you?"

"My belief is that she parted with them in some way to that man," answered Mr. Gordon; "and that her father most probably gave her the money to recompense me for my loss; but that when she paid it, she was unaware that the man had the intention of restoring the jewels."

Lord Ellingham made no answer: for there suddenly flashed upon his mind a reminiscence which staggered him.

The reader will recollect that when Mr. de Medina encountered his daughter at the police-court, he said to her, "*Oh! Esther—Esther, I can understand it all. You have brought this upon yourself!*" These words were overheard at the time by Lord Ellingham: but they had since escaped his memory—or else failed to make any very deep impression upon him,—his own mind, since that day, having been a prey to much acute anxiety, suspense, and conflicting feelings, on account of Lady Hatfield.

But now, when he recalled those words, and considered them in all their significance,—when he pondered upon the tale which he had just heard

from the lips of the diamond-merchant,—when he remembered that the man who had restored those jewels was doubtless the same who had conveyed to Pall Mall the letter which so mysteriously urged him to hasten to the police-court and give his testimony in Esther's defence,—he began to share Mr. Gordon's belief that there must be some connexion between that florid, light-haired man and Miss de Medina.

At the same time, Lord Ellingham was convinced that Esther had *not* stolen the diamonds; or that, if she had, Mr. Gordon had mistaken the hour of the day, if not the day itself, on which such theft was committed. Because Arthur remembered, beyond all possibility of error, that from two o'clock on the afternoon until near eleven o'clock at night, on the day specified by the diamond-merchant, Esther was engaged in visiting the house which her father had hired from him (Lord Ellingham), and which was situate about a mile beyond Finchley. Arthur himself accompanied Mr. de Medina and Esther on that occasion; and Esther was never absent from his sight, save perhaps for a few minutes at a time, during the interval above named.

There was a profound mystery somewhere: and though the Earl was not characterised by any feeling of impertinent curiosity, yet he longed to clear up the doubts and misgivings which had at length arisen in his mind. He entertained the greatest respect for Mr. de Medina, and—until now—the same sentiment towards Esther, whom he had hitherto looked upon as a model of purity, amiability, and innocence. He therefore felt grieved—vexed—disappointed—annoyed, for the honour of the human race, and especially for the credit of the female sex, to think it possible that he had been so grossly deceived in that beautiful Jewess.

He walked slowly along, the diamond-merchant by his side.

"Well, my lord," said the latter, at length breaking the protracted silence, "what is your opinion now?"

"I confess that I am bewildered," was the reply. "But I shall not judge hastily. In the meantime, I pray you so far to suspend your opinion upon the subject as to avoid the utterance of aught prejudicial to Miss de Medina's character; and if I succeed in fathoming this mystery, the fact of that young lady's guilt or innocence shall be duly communicated to you."

The diamond-merchant bowed respectfully, and departed in another direction; while Lord Ellingham continued his way towards Grafton Street.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OATH.

DR. LASCELLES was at home, and immediately granted an audience to the Earl of Ellingham.

Popular physicians are potentates in their way, and access to them, save on matters of professional business, is frequently difficult.

But the doctor had taken a greater fancy to the young nobleman than he was ever known to entertain for any of his acquaintances; and he therefore received him as one who did not encroach on his very valuable time.

"Well," said the physician, as the Earl made his appearance in the professional reception-room,

"something new about Lady Hatfield, I'll be bound?"

"You are right, my dear doctor," answered the lover: "and I am the happiest of men."

"I am charmed to hear it," said Lascelles, casting a glance of curiosity, not unmingled with surprise, towards the Earl.

"Yes, doctor," cried the latter, his handsome countenance irradiated with the lustre of complete felicity, "the beautiful Georgiana has consented to become my wife."

"Your wife!" ejaculated the physician.

"And wherefore not?" asked the Earl, astonished at the tone and manner of his friend. "Do you think that I will allow what must be considered a misfortune to stand in the way of my happiness?"

"Certainly—if you can rise superior to a prejudice which influences the generality of the world," said the physician, thrown off his guard by Lord Ellingham's last observation. "I do not see—"

"Ah! then you also know all?" ejaculated the Earl. "But let us not dwell on this topic. Suffice it that I have heard from Sir Ralph Walsingham enough to convince me that his niece is to be commiserated in a certain respect; and I have had a full explanation with her on the subject. In a few weeks she will be Lady Ellingham; and it shall be my duty—as it will also prove my delight—to make her so completely happy that she shall forget the incident which has had so powerful an effect upon her mind."

"I sincerely wish you all possible felicity, my dear Earl," said the doctor, shaking the young nobleman warmly by the hand.

"A thousand thanks, doctor," exclaimed Arthur, cordially returning the pressure. "But how became you acquainted with that incident in Georgiana's life which has exercised such influence over her? I thought you told me yesterday that she had not entered into any explanations with you?"

"Neither had she—nor has she, my dear lord," observed the physician, who seemed slightly surprised, if not puzzled, by the observations of his young friend. "But—as you yourself ere now said—let us not dwell on that topic;—it is of too delicate a nature."

"It's delicate, my dear doctor," responded the Earl. "But as I am my own master, and labour not under the necessity of consulting my relatives as to those proceedings which are connected with my interest or happiness—"

"Oh! certainly," said the doctor. "You love Lady Hatfield—and she loves you in return. It is quite natural. I have known many such cases—more, perhaps, than you could imagine."

"I do not doubt you," replied the Earl. "But I will not longer intrude on your valuable time," he added, smiling; "for I know that you are not in the habit of receiving visits of a merely friendly nature at this period of the day."

"To you only am I accessible on such terms," replied the physician.

The Earl then took his leave, and was about to return home, when he bethought himself of the strange communication he had received from Mr. Gordon, the diamond-merchant; and, as the weather was fine and frosty, he determined to walk as far as the residence of Mr. de Medina in Great Ormond Street.

On his arrival at that gentleman's house, he found the servant standing at the front-door in the act of receiving some articles from a tradesman's boy; and this trivial fact is only recorded, inasmuch as it explains the reason how Lord Ellingham ascended to the drawing-room without being duly announced. He considered himself to be on terms of sufficient intimacy with Mr. de Medina to take such a liberty; and when the domestic made a movement to conduct him up stairs, Arthur desired him in a condescending manner not to take the trouble, as he knew the way.

Accordingly, the Earl proceeded to the drawing-room, where he did not, however, find Mr. de Medina and his daughter, although, from the statement of the servant, he had expected to meet them there.

The floor was spread with a thick, rich Turkey carpet, on which his footsteps fell noiselessly. He was about to seat himself, when voices in the adjoining apartment, which was only separated from the drawing-room by folding-doors, met his ears.

"Esther," said Mr. de Medina, speaking in an earnest and solemn tone, "this is the third anniversary of that dreadful day which——"

"Oh! do not refer more than is necessary to that sad event, dear father!" exclaimed the Jewess, in an imploring voice.

"Heaven knows, my child," responded her sire, "that—if you feel as I do——"

"I do—I do, dearest father!" cried Esther.

"Yes—but not all the degradation—the infamy—the shame——"

"All—all, father,—even as acutely as yourself!" she said, in a voice denoting the most intense anguish.

"And yet, undutiful girl that you are," exclaimed Mr. de Medina, "you persist in seeing that lost—abandoned——"

The sudden rattling of a carriage in the street drowned the remainder of this sentence.

"Oh! my dearest father, forgive me!" cried Esther in a tone of the most earnest appeal. "You cannot imagine the extent of my love—my boundless love—for that unfortunate——"

"Unfortunate!" repeated Mr. de Medina angrily: "no—no! Say that most wretched—guilty—criminal——"

"My God! use not such harsh terms!" almost shrieked the beautiful Jewess; and the Earl of Ellingham could judge by the sound that she fell upon her knees as she spoke.

"Yes—Esther—on your knees implore my forgiveness for your oft-repeated disobedience!" exclaimed Mr. de Medina. "Consider, undutiful—ungrateful girl—of the position—the scandalous, disgraceful position in which you were placed a few days ago. That ring which was sold to the diamond-merchant——"

"Pardon me, dearest father—oh! pardon me!" cried the young lady, her voice becoming wildly hysterical.

Again a vehicle rolled along the street; and of the Jew's reply all that the Earl could distinguish were the words—"those diamonds, Esther—the theft of those diamonds! Oh! my God—I shall yet go mad with the dreadful thought!"

"Oh! this is cruel—most cruel, after all I have suffered!" cried Esther. "Wherefore revive those terrible reproaches now? Say—speak, father—

what do you require of me? wherefore this conversation?"

"Again I must remind you," answered Mr. de Medina solemnly, "that this is the third anniversary of that day——"

"I know it—I know it? Oh! how can I ever forget it?" said Esther in a tone of the most painful emotion.

"And now," continued Mr. de Medina, apparently but little moved by his daughter's grief,—"now must you swear, Esther—upon that book which contains the principles of our creed—that you will never, under any circumstances——"

Mr. de Medina here sank his voice to so low a tone, that the Earl could only catch a few disjointed phrases, such as these—"renew your connexion with—acknowledge that—such infamy and disgrace—honoured name—family—seduced my daughter—robbed her of her purity—although the world may not suspect—degradation on yourself—discard you for ever—Thomas Rainford——"

"I swear!" said Esther, in a tone which led the Earl to imagine that she took the prescribed oath with a dreadful shudder.

"And now rise," exclaimed Mr. de Medina. "It is over."

These words suddenly awoke the Earl to a consciousness of his position: and his face became scarlet as the thought flashed upon his mind that he had been playing the part of an eaves-dropper. He despised himself for having listened to the dialogue between Mr. de Medina and his daughter; but his attention had been so completely rivetted to this strange—mysterious—and exciting conversation, that he had unwittingly remained a hearer. An invisible spell had nailed him as it were to the spot—had forced him to linger and drink in that discourse which, alas! appeared to speak so eloquently to the discredit of her whose character he had so warmly defended two hours before!

And now, suddenly awaking—as we said—to a sense of his position, he perceived that a subterfuge could alone save him from the imputation of being an eaves-dropper: and to that subterfuge was this really noble-minded peer compelled to stoop.

Hastily stepping to the drawing-room door, he opened it and closed it again with unusual violence, so that the sound might fall upon the ears of Mr. de Medina and Esther, and induce them to believe that he had only just entered the room.

The stratagem succeeded; for Mr. de Medina immediately made his appearance from the inner apartment, and welcomed the Earl with his wonted calmness of manner.

In reply to Arthur's polite inquiries relative to Miss de Medina, the father replied that his daughter was somewhat indisposed, and hoped the Earl would excuse her absence.

A quarter of an hour passed in conversation of no particular interest to the reader; and Lord Ellingham then took his leave.

When he found himself once more in the open street, he could scarcely believe that he was not the sport of some wild and delusive dream. Had he heard aright? or had his ears beguiled him? Was it true that all those reproaches had been levelled by an angry father at the head of a daughter who did not attempt to deny her guilt, but who was compelled to implore that outraged parent's for-

givenness? Had he not prescribed to her an oath which seemed to imply, in plain terms,—although the Earl had caught but detached portions,—that Esther had been seduced—robbed of her purity,—and that the villain was one Thomas Rainford? Had not that oath been administered for the purpose of binding her to break off her connexion with this Thomas Rainford? And did not Mr. de Medina assure her that, though the world might not suspect it, yet she had not the less brought degradation on herself? In fine—did not the angry father threaten to discard her for ever, unless she swore to obey his injunctions?

In what other way could the blanks in the terms of the oath—as Ellingham had gathered them by means of the few but significant disjointed passages thereof,—in what other way could those blanks be filled up than in the manner above detailed?

"It is too apparent!" thought the Earl within himself: "and Esther is an abandoned—lost—degraded girl! And yet how deceptive is her appearance—how delusive her demeanour! Purity seems to be expressed in every glance:—innocence characterises every word she utters! Merciful heavens! what must I think of the female sex after such a discovery as this? And yet, let me not judge harshly of the whole, because *one* is frail. My own Georgiana is quite different from that artful hypocrite, Esther de Medina. Georgiana conceals not a tainted soul beneath a chaste exterior: she is purity in mind as well as in appearance. And, after all, Esther *did* steal the diamonds: her father upbraided her with the theft! He even alluded to the ring which she sold to Mr. Gordon. Yes—it is indeed too apparent: she is utterly depraved! But that name of *Thomas Rainford*—surely I have heard it before?"

The Earl strove to recollect himself.

"Oh! I remember now!" he thought at the expiration of a few moments: "it was Thomas Rainford who was accused of robbing my Georgiana on the high-way! How strange is this coincidence! And yet it was *not* that man who plundered her—for she proved his innocence of at least this imputation. But it was doubtless Rainford who sent me the letter desiring me to appear in the defence of Esther; and it must also have been he who restored the diamonds to the merchant! That Esther stole those diamonds is clear—for her father accused her of it. At least such is the inference that must be drawn from his words. But that Gordon was wrong as to the day, or the hour of the day on which the theft was committed, is also clear; inasmuch as Esther was at Finchley at the time stated! Still Gordon was so positive—and, when he appeared to prosecute the Jewess at the police-office, so short a time had elapsed—only a few hours, indeed—since the act was perpetrated, that it is difficult to believe how he could have mistaken the date! There is a mystery yet attending on this affair;—but that its elucidation would establish Esther's innocence, cannot for a moment be believed!"

Such was the train of thought into which the Earl of Ellingham was naturally led by the dialogue he had overheard between the Jew and his daughter.

He was sincerely grieved to be forced to come to the conviction that Esther de Medina was a lost and ruined girl, instead of the pure and artless being he had previously believed her to be. Although his

affections were undividedly Georgiana's, yet he had entertained a sentiment of friendship for the Jewess; and he was pained and shocked to think that he had ever experienced any interest—even the slightest—in a female so utterly unworthy his notice. For the father he still felt respect, which was also now blended with profound commiseration; for he beheld in him an honest and honourable man, who was cursed with a daughter characterised by bad passions and evil propensities.

The Earl was well aware that Mr. De Medina was a very rich man: he could not therefore suppose that necessity had induced Esther either to dispose of the ring or to steal the jewels. What, then, could he conclude? That she required funds to support a worthless, abandoned, and lost man—her paramour! Hence the sale of the ring—hence the theft of the diamonds.

Arthur now remembered his promise to Mr. Gordon to make him acquainted with any particulars which he might discover relative to that business. But how could he fulfil his pledge? He shrank from the contemplation of the circumstance which had made him acquainted with Esther's guilt: he felt annoyed and vexed with himself for having allowed his curiosity so far to dominate his honourable principles as to render him an eaves-dropper. He would not therefore aggravate his offence by imparting its results to another; and, with an endeavour to banish the subject from his memory and turn his attention to more pleasurable topics, he hastily pursued his way homeward.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ALARM.—THE LETTER.

IN the meantime Esther de Medina had retired to her own apartment, immediately after the strange, painful, and exciting scene which had taken place with her father.

Seating herself upon a sofa, she burst into a violent flood of tears.

The delicate tinge of carnation which usually appeared beneath the clear, transparent olive hue of her complexion, was now chased away; and she was pale—very pale.

Her grief was evidently intense: anguish overwhelmed her spirit.

Oh, Esther! if thou art indeed a guilty—frail—fallen being, the eye cannot refuse a tear of pity to thy lost condition!

No:—for never has even the enamoured poet in his dreams conceived a form and face more perfect than nature had bestowed upon her. There appeared, too, such a virgin freshness about that charming creature who was just bursting into womanhood,—such a halo of innocence seemed to surround her,—so much modesty, so much propriety characterised her slightest attitudes and her most unimportant words, that to contemplate her for a few minutes and yet retain the stubborn conviction that she was a wanton, amounted almost to an impossibility.

And now—to behold her plunged in grief—alone with her own wretched thoughts, and weeping,—who could believe that the lips, on which purity appeared to dwell, had ever been pressed by those of the seducer,—that the sylph-like form, whose

sweeping, undulating outlines were so gracefully set forth by the mournfulness of her attitude, had ever unveiled its beauties on the bed of illicit love,—that the rude hand of licentiousness had ever disturbed the treasures of the bosom so carefully concealed:—who could believe all this?

Nevertheless, says the reader, appearances are so completely against her—the evidences of her guilt seem so damning—that, alas! there is not a hope of her innocence!

But let us continue the thread of our narrative.

For half an hour did Esther remain absorbed in the most profound affliction—a prey to thoughts and reminiscences of a very painful nature.

At length she rose abruptly, and evidently strove to conquer her grief.

She wiped away the tears from her fine black eyes, and advanced towards the window, from behind the curtains of which she gazed into the street with the view of directing her thoughts into some new channel.

Suddenly an idea struck her; and she hastened to her writing-desk, at which she sat down and began to pen a letter.

While she was thus engaged, the crystal drops ever and anon started from her eyes, and trembled on the jetty fringes, the glossy darkness of which no oriental dye could have enhanced.

In the midst of her occupation—the progress of which was marked by many an ill-subdued sob—a female servant entered the room to acquaint Miss de Medina that her father had just received a letter on some business that required his immediate attention, and that she was not to expect him home to dinner.

The domestic then withdrew; and Esther finished her letter, which she folded and concealed in her bosom.

It was now five o'clock; and she descended to the dining-room;—but she had no appetite—and the ceremony of the repast, to which she was compelled to sit down alone, was by no means calculated to enliven her spirits.

Quitting the table as soon as possible, she returned to her chamber, put on her bonnet and shawl, and hurried into the fresh air, which she hoped would have an exhilarating influence upon her.

Esther drew her veil closely over her face, and proceeded to Southampton Row, where she entered a shop at which the local post-office was stationed.

The woman who stood behind the counter appeared to recognise her, and immediately handed her a letter which was addressed simply to "*A. B. C., Post-Office, Southampton Row. To be left till called for.*"

Miss de Medina purchased a few articles of fancy stationery—evidently with the view to recompense the shopkeeper for the trouble of receiving her letters, and not because she required the things; and while the woman was occupied in making up the parcel, Esther proceeded to read the communication just placed in her hands.

For this purpose she raised her veil, and approached the light which burnt near the window.

The letter was short: but its contents drew tears from the eyes of the beautiful Jewess.

Scarcely had she terminated the perusal, when she was startled by hearing a voice at the door distinctly exclaim, "There she is, by heaven!"

Instinctively glancing in that direction, she be-

held a very pale-faced lad of apparently fifteen or sixteen gazing intently upon her from the immediate vicinity of the threshold of the shop; and close behind him—with his eyes also fixed upon her—stood a very tall, thin, old man of most repulsive aspect.

The instant Esther looked towards them, the old man laid his hand on the lad's shoulder and hurried him away; and Esther—somewhat alarmed by the incident—took up the little parcel of stationery, wished the woman a courteous "good evening," and quitted the shop.

When she again found herself in the street, she drew down her veil, and hastened towards the nearest hackney-coach stand.

A vehicle speedily drew alongside of the kerbstone for her accommodation; and as she was stepping into it, she distinctly beheld, through the folds of her veil, the tall old man and the pale lad entering another vehicle at a little distance.

She could not be mistaken—for the shops sent forth a flood of light which rendered the forms of those two persons plainly visible.

The coachman had to repeat his inquiry whither he was to drive, ere Esther could recover her presence of mind sufficiently to reply.

"To the nearest post-office in Holborn," she at length said.

"Why, Lord bless you, ma'am—there's one close by here—not ten yards off," answered the Jarvey, who was an honest fellow in his way.

"Never mind," said Esther. "I wish to be taken to another."

The man urged no farther objection, but mounted his box and drove away—quietly settling in his own mind that his "fare" was either mad or tipsy, he neither knew nor cared which.

Miss de Medina could not shake off an oppressive suspicion which had forced itself upon her. She fancied that she was watched;—and, for the simple reason that she knew nothing of the old man and the lad, her uneasiness increased into actual alarm.

This feeling was enhanced, too, when her quick ears caught the rumbling sound of another vehicle behind: and she began to blame herself for having ventured abroad at such an hour.

Then she reasoned with herself that no harm could possibly happen to her in the midst of a densely populated city, and while people were walking about in all directions:—but still, in spite of this attempt at self-assurance, the pale countenance of the lad and the sinister looks of the old man haunted her like spirits of evil.

But in a few minutes the hackney-coach entered Holborn; and the blaze of light—the bustle—the throng of vehicles—the crowd of foot-passengers—and the animated appearance of the whole scene, dispelled nearly all her alarms.

The vehicle drew up nearly at the corner of Fetter Lane; and Esther alighted.

Another hackney-coach stopped simultaneously at a short distance; and her eyes were immediately directed towards it.

"Here's the post-office, ma'am," said the driver of the vehicle which she had hired.

Miss de Medina started—recollected herself—and hastened to thrust into the letter-box the epistle which she had written ere she left home.

The address on that epistle was—"T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields."

This superscription was caught by the sharp eyes

of the pale-faced boy, who had stolen—quick as thought—up to the shop-window, and now stood by Esther's side as she dropped the letter into the box.

When Esther turned hastily to regain the vehicle, she beheld the lad retreating with strange speed from the spot.

"What can this mean?" she thought within herself. "Who is it that is thus watching my movements?"

And, seriously alarmed, she hurried back to the coach, giving orders to be driven direct to Great Ormond Street.

Away went the vehicle again; and the noise of crowded Holborn prevented the Jewess from judging by sounds whether the other hackney-coach was following—for that she was watched, she had no longer any doubt.

Suddenly a suspicion struck her like an icy chill. Could her father have employed spies to dog her—to mark her movements? Circumstances, on the one hand, suggested the probability of such an occurrence; while, on the other, the character of her parent was of a nature repugnant to such a proceeding. He was stern and severe, but strictly honourable; and Esther knew that he was not a man likely to adopt underhand measures.

Then wherefore was she watched? and why had the lad crept close up to her as she put the letter into the box?

The coach had turned up Gray's Inn Lane, which thoroughfare was more quiet than Holborn; and Esther could hear no sounds of a second vehicle.

Our readers are probably aware that the generality of hackney-coaches have, or rather *had* (for they are nearly extinct at the present day) a little window behind, covered with a sort of flap made of the same material as the lining.

Esther turned round and raised the flap to assure herself that there was really no vehicle following the one in which she was. But at the same instant a face disappeared as if it had suddenly sunk into the earth; but not before the Jewess had recognised the pale features and dark eyes of the lad.

A faint cry escaped her lips; and she fell back on the seat, a prey to vague but serious alarm.

In a few moments she recovered her self-possession, and again endeavoured to dispel her fears by arguing that no harm could possibly befall her—that, if any outrage were intended, her screams would speedily bring hundreds to her rescue—and that after all no real cause for apprehension might exist.

She arrived without accident in Great Ormond Street; and when she alighted at her own door, the lad who had terrified her was no longer to be seen.

Her father had not yet returned; and she was therefore again left to the companionship of her own thoughts. But when she was seated by the cheerful fire in the drawing-room, and with the bright lamp burning on the table, she smiled at those alarms which had ere now oppressed her.

The entire adventure now were quite another aspect in her imagination. The old man and the boy were probably thieves who prowled about to pursue their avocation where they could: she had most likely been mistaken in the idea that they had entered a hackney-coach in Southampton Row simultaneously with herself; but they had followed her

vehicle on foot; and when she stepped out to post her letter, the lad had taken that opportunity of creeping close up to her to pick her pocket. Having failed by the suddenness with which she had turned round, he had afterwards got up behind the coach to dog her to the end of her journey, with the hope of still succeeding in his predatory design; but when she had looked through the back-window, he had disappeared.

Such was the explanation which she now arranged in her mind for her own satisfaction. But, then, what could mean the words uttered at the door of the shop in Southampton Row—"There she is, by heaven!"

Fancy again came to her aid to set this point at rest:—she had most probably been watched by the old man and the lad before she was aware of the fact; and they had lost sight of her; but when they passed the shop her presence there had elicited the ejaculation from the youth.

Such was the manner in which Esther tranquillised herself relative to the little occurrence that had so much alarmed her;—whether her conjectures were well-founded, or not, the reader may judge by what we are about to relate.

No sooner had she posted her letter in Holborn, than Jacob, who had managed to get sight of its superscription, darted back to the second hackney-coach which had stopped near the top of Fetter Lane, and leaping in, said to Old Death, who was inside, "The letter is addressed to 'T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields.'"

"And that is Tom Rain's place," ejaculated Bones. "Well—do you follow her—get up behind the coach—and meet me at Bunce's presently."

Away started Jacob; and when he was gone, Old Death alighted from the vehicle which he had hired in Southampton Row to follow Esther, dismissed it, and walked boldly into the shop where that young lady had posted her letter.

A lad was in attendance behind the counter.

"My boy," said Old Death, in as pleasant a tone as he could assume, "I just this minute dropped a letter into the box; and I remember that I have made a mistake in a particular circumstance mentioned in its contents."

"You can't have it back again," replied the boy. "It's against the rules."

"Well, I know it is," said Old Death coaxingly. "But it's of the greatest consequence to me to alter a particular part of it; and, if you'll oblige me, here's half-a-crown for your trouble."

Thus speaking, he displayed the proffered coin.

Now half-a-crown was a great temptation to a lad who only earned eighteen-pence a week in addition to his food: moreover, the master of the shop was absent at the moment, and not very likely to return in a hurry—for the boy knew he was with a party of friends at a neighbouring public-house:—and thus Old Death's silver argument was effectual.

"Well—I s'pose I must," said the youth. "But do n't tell any body about it, though. What's the address?"

"T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields."

The boy unlocked the letter-box, selected the particular epistle, and handed it to Old Death, who threw the half-crown on the counter, and marched off with the letter.

He could not restrain his curiosity until he reached

Seven Dials or any other place which he was in the habit of frequenting, and accordingly turned into a public-house in the neighbourhood. There he ordered some refreshment, seated himself in a corner of the parlour, and carefully opened the letter in such a way that it might be resealed without exciting a suspicion of having ever been tampered with.

He then read the contents, which ran as follows:—

"I sit down in anguish of heart to pen a few lines to you—to you whom I love so sincerely, but whom I must never see more. My father has just made me take a terrible oath to that effect; and so determined was his manner—so resolute was he—so stern—so severe—(alas! that I should be compelled to say so!)—that I dared not refuse to obey his command. And yet you know that I am as devotedly attached to you as ever—and I have suffered—all I have undergone on your account, must convince you of my unchanged, unchangeable affection. Do not, then, think ill of me on account of the oath which my father wrested from me! My God! how my heart palpitates, as I write these lines! Oh! if you knew the state of my mind you would pity me! I am wretched—heaven send that you are more happy than I! Alas! cannot you take compassion upon me—upon me, your own tender Esther—and quit the path which you are pursuing? It is not too late to do so—it is never too late. All might yet be well: my father would forget the past—and we should be re-united. Think of this—ponder well upon it—and remember how much happiness will be wrecked for ever, if you persist in a course which I tremble to reflect upon. To be connected with a highwayman is dreadful! Pardon me—forgive me for speaking thus plainly;—but you know how sincerely I love you—and if I write that terrible word '*highwayman*,' it is merely to fix your thoughts the more seriously on that point. What must be the end of this course of life? Public infamy—or perhaps a scaffold! Again I say, forgive me for writing thus:—I scarcely know what I commit to paper—there are moments when my brain reels as I contemplate the subject of my letter.

"I can write no more. Perhaps I shall find a note from you at the post office in Southampton Row: I hope so—and I also hope that I may discover in its cause of satisfaction to myself. Adieu—dearest, adieu.

«ESTHER.»

The contents of this letter sadly puzzled Old Death. They were quite different from what he had expected to find them; but without waiting to reflect upon their nature, he obtained a piece of sealing-wax from the waiter, and so cleverly closed the letter again that even a clerk in the General Post-Office could not have told it had been opened.

He then retraced his way to the shop in Holborn where it was originally posted, and threw it back into the box.

This being done, he bent his way towards Toby Bunce's house in Earl Street, Seven Dials.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLD DEATH.

WHEN Bones reached the place whither he had bent his steps, he learnt to his satisfaction that Toby Bunce had been sent out by his wife on some errand which would keep him at least an hour away. He accordingly followed Mrs. Bunce into the back room, and explained to her all that had occurred.

Having stated how he and Jacob had followed Esther in the hackney-coach from Southampton Row to Holborn, he said—"When Jacob first pointed her out to me as she was reading a letter in a shop, I felt sure he must be mistaken; for I could not conceive why she should be up at that part of the

town, since from what Jacob discovered last night, I thought she was certainly living with Tom Rain in Lock's Fields. However, I determined to follow her; and when she got down at a shop in Holborn, I told Jacob to jump out and get another good look at her, if possible. But, instead of going into the shop, she merely stopped there to post a letter; and Jacob was quick enough to catch sight of the address. Well, when he came back to me, and told me what that address was, I desired him to follow her directly; for I thought that if she was writing to Tom Rain, it was clear she did not live with him, and therefore it was as well to find out where she does live."

"To be sure," said Mrs. Bunce approvingly.

"Then it struck me," continued Old Death, "that if I could only get sight of the contents of that letter which she had posted to Tom Rain, it might open some farther clue to the nature of their connexion. And I did get the letter—"

"Oh! you clever fellow!" interrupted Betsy, shaking her head with mock gravity. "But what did the letter say?"

"Why, it was a regular sermon," answered Old Death. "It talked about how much she loved him—all she had done and suffered on his account—and a lot of gammon of that kind. She told him how her father had made her take an oath not to see him any more, and how unhappy she was. Then she begged of him to repent and leave a course of life that is sure to end at Tuck-up Fair."

"Did she use them words?" demanded Mrs. Bunce.

"No, you fool!" cried Old Death. "She writes quite like a lady, and in a beautiful hand too! But, after having said all I have told you, she let him know that she shuddered at the idea of being connected with a highwayman: and she begged his pardon for calling him so."

"A pleasant letter for Tom to receive!" observed Mrs. Bunce.

"Very. And she drops a hint," continued Old Death, "that if he will give up his business, there is a chance of her father forgiving Tom for what is past, and of their being re-united—that's the very word."

"Do you think they are married, then?" asked the woman.

"I should say not," replied Bones; "because she talks of being connected with a highwayman—and that's not a word a wife uses to her husband. Besides, the whole letter did not look like one written by a wife—but rather a mistress. And then it ends by saying that she hopes to find a letter from him at the post-office in Southampton Row."

"Find a letter—when?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"Why, to-day—this evening, I suppose," said Old Death. "She had evidently written her letter before she went to the post-office in Southampton Row, where she did find one from him—because she was reading a note when Jacob first twigged her. And it was singular enough that we were just talking of her at that very identical moment."

"Then the letter you read was not an answer to the one she received in Southampton Row?" said Mrs. Bunce.

"Of course not, stupid!" cried Old Death. "We followed her straight down to Holborn, and she never stopped or went in any where to write an answer. The letter I read was already written—"



written too in the afternoon, most likely just before she came out to go to Southampton Row. And another reason that made me anxious to get hold of her letter to Tom Rain, was that she did n't post it at the office where she received *his*, but took the trouble to go down to Holborn to put it into another box."

"I wonder why she did that?" said Mrs. Bunce.

"Oh! most likely to avoid exciting any suspicion or curiosity at the office in Southampton Row. Then there's another thing that puzzles me:—she was with Tom Rain last night—Jacob saw them together, and followed them home to Lock's Fields; and she is away from him to-day—writes to him this afternoon—and hopes to find a letter from him when she goes to Southampton Row this evening. One would think, by this, that they have been in the habit of corresponding together, and that the place in Southampton Row is where he directs his letters to her. So it's pretty clear that they do n't live together for good and all. But what perplexes me most is the sermon that she wrote him. It's plain she stole the diamonds, from what Jacob overheard Tom say to her when he gave her the ear-rings last night; and yet she

does n't reproach herself a bit in the letter to him. She only tries to convert Rainford; and, to read that letter, one would think she was as innocent of a theft or such-like thing as a child unborn."

"Oh! I dare say she wrote the letter for some object or another which we can't see," observed Mrs. Bunce.

"I scarcely think so," returned Bones: "there was so much seriousness about it."

"But she's a precious deep one, depend on it," said Betsy. "Look how she got off about the diamonds. And, after all, perhaps her father had been talking her over; and so, if she wrote to Tom Rain in a serious way, the humour won't last very long."

"Well—we shall see," exclaimed Old Death. "I should like to secure her in my interests."

"What did you do with the letter she wrote to Tom Rain?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"Put it back into the post," was the reply. "Fancy if Esther and Tom *did* get together again, and, on comparing notes, he found that the letter from her had miscarried, he might suspect a trick somewhere, and fix foul play on me. No—no: it was more prudent to let the note go, since I had gathered its contents."

"Well—perhaps it was," said Mrs. Bunce. "One thing is very clear, Ben——"

"What's that, Betsy?"

"Why, that since Esther isn't any longer with Mr. Rainford in the fields, it will be much easier to get the little boy away."

"I thought of that just now," said Old Death: then, after a pause, he added, "And I'll tell you what's to be done. The boy must be got into our power to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night!" repeated Mrs. Bunce.

"Yes—to-morrow night," returned Bones emphatically. "I'll trump up something to get Tom out of the way; and me, Toby, and Jacob, will go over and kidnap the child. If we don't do it quick, the Jewess will be getting spooney on Tom again and going back to live with him in spite of her oath to her father; and then we may not find such another chance for some time to come."

Mrs. Bunce smiled an approval of this scheme, and was about to offer a comment, when a knock summoned her to the front-door.

She shortly returned to the back-room, followed by Jacob.

"What news?" demanded Old Death.

"I found out where the Jewess lives," was the lad's answer; and he named the address in Great Ormond Street.

"Good!" exclaimed Bones. "That shows why she has her letters sent to Southampton Row;—it is close by; and as she's known in the neighbourhood, she posts her answers at another place. But give Jacob his supper—and brew me some grog, Betsy."

While Mrs. Bunce was busily employed in executing these orders, another knock at the front-door was heard. Jacob hastened to answer it, and returned with a letter directed to "Mr. TOBY BUNCE;" but which, having a peculiar mark placed somewhere amidst the writing, was instantly discovered by Old Death to be intended for himself.

He accordingly opened it, and read as follows:—

"Tim put on the tats yesterday and went out a durr-nakin on the shallows, gadding the hoof. He buzzed a bloak and a shakerster of a yack and a skin. His jomen Mutton-Face Sal, with her moll-sack quereering a racian, stalled. A cross cove, who had his regulars, tipped the chice 'Cop Busy!' and Tim twiggid that a pig was marking. So he speeled to the crib, while his jomen shoved her trunk too. To-day Tim sent the yack to church and chrusten; but the churchman came to it through poll, as Tim's shaler had slummed on him a sprat and an alderman last week. So Tim didn't flight cocum enough, and was grabbed. The skin had three flinnips and a foont, which I've got at the padding-ken, T's 23, where I'll cop them to you for edging the gaff. A fly kidden-gonnoff will leave this flim.

"TWENTY-FIVE."

Old Death having read this singular composition to himself, threw it into the fire.

He then sat pondering for a few moments upon the course which he should pursue under the circumstances just made known to him.

And while he is thus engaged in meditation, we will lay before our readers a translation of the slang document:—

"Tim dressed himself in rags yesterday, and went out disguised as a beggar half-naked and without shoes or stockings. He robbed a gentleman and a lady of a watch and a purse. His mistress Mutton-face Sal, with her reticule, and looking like a respectable female, was on the

look-out close at hand. A confederate-thief, who went shares with Tim, suddenly gave the alarm, so that Tim might hand him over the plunder; and Tim saw that a person was watching him. So he hurried off home, while his woman got off safely also. To-day Tim sent the watch to have the works taken out and put in another case and to get the maker's name altered; but the watchmaker informed against him through spite, because Tim's mistress had passed off on him (the watchmaker) a bad sixpence and half-crown last week. So Tim wasn't wary enough, and was taken into custody. The purse had three five-pound notes and a sovereign in it, which I have got at Thompson's lodging-house, No. 23, where I will hand them over to you if you will try and get Tim off. A sharp boy-thief will leave this letter."

The signature "TWENTY-FIVE" indicated the number attached to the writer's name in Old Death's private list of those thieves who were accustomed to do business with him.

"Anything new?" inquired Mrs. Bunce, handing him a glass of hot gin-and-water.

"Nothing particular," was the reply. "Only Tim the Snammer* got himself into a scrape. But I shall go and see about it directly."

"Tim isn't on your list—is he?" demanded Mrs. Bunce.

"No; but Josh Pedlar—that's Number Twenty-five—has got Tim's money, and will hand it over to me. So——"

A loud knock at the door interrupted Old Death's observation.

Jacob was sent to answer the summons; and in a few moments Tom Rain walked jauntily into the room.

"Well, my prince of fences," he exclaimed, addressing Old Death, as he cast himself unceremoniously into a chair, and stretched out his legs in a free and independent manner, "anything new in the wind?"

"Yes—a trifling job—for to-morrow night, Tom," answered Bones. "But you'll be making your fortune at this rate?" he added, with one of his hideous chuckles.

"The sooner, the better," cried the highwayman.

"And then you'd be able to retire from business—marry—and settle yourself comfortably," said Old Death, with apparent indifference of manner, but in reality watching Rainford's countenance attentively as he uttered the word "marry."

"Oh! as for settling," exclaimed Tom, laughing, "I am not the chap to bury myself in a cottage in Wales or Devonshire. I don't like that sort of thing. Business and bustle suit me best."

"But what do you say to marriage, Tom? A good looking fellow like you might do something in that line to great advantage," observed Old Death.

"That's my own affair," returned the highwayman hastily.

"By-the-bye, what have you done with the boy that was thrown on your hands t'other night?" asked Old Death.

"I am taking care of him, to be sure," was the answer. "If I abandon him, he must go to the workhouse. But what is the little job you were talking about?"

"A worthy citizen and his wife will pass over Shooter's Hill to-morrow night, at about eleven o'clock, in a yellow post-chaise," replied Bones, inventing the tale as he went on. "The cit will

* Snammer—a thief

have enough in his pocket-book to make it worth while to ease him of it; and the post-boy will stop when he's ordered to do so. They were to have gone to-night; but something has happened to put off their journey till to-morrow."

"Good," said Tom. "The business shall be done. Any thing else to communicate to-night?"

"Nothing," was the answer.

"Won't you stay and take a drop of something warm, Mr. Rainford?" asked Betsy Bunce, in her most winning way.

"No, thank 'ee," returned Tom. "I must be off. Good night."

And the highwayman took his departure.

When the front-door was closed behind him, Old Death said, with a chuckle, "Well, he'll be out of the way to-morrow night; and we shall get hold of the boy. But I shall now just step up to Castle Street, and see what's going on at twenty-three."

"Shall you come back here to-night?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"I can't say. It's now nine o'clock; and if I do, it will be by ten. Jacob, my boy, you needn't wait unless you like."

Old Death then left the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CASTLE STREET, LONG ACRE.

To the north of Long Acre runs Castle Street—for many years notorious as a nest of thieves, prostitutes, and juvenile vagabonds of the most degraded description.

At the period of which we are writing, a person, of the name of Thompson, owned—and probably still possesses—the lodging-houses numbered 23, 24, and 25 in Castle Street. This individual resided in Mint Street, Borough, where he had similar houses, in addition to others in Buckeridge Street, St. Giles's.

The houses in Buckeridge Street would make up one hundred beds; and those in Castle Street sixty.

At lodging-houses of this description the rooms are filled with low truckle-beds, each having a straw mattress, two coarse sheets, a blanket, and a rug. The price of half a bed is three-pence; and it need scarcely be observed that men, women, and children sleep together in these filthy receptacles without the slightest regard to decency or modesty. Sometimes, when the lodging-houses are particularly crowded, three persons will share one bed;—or motives of economy frequently compel a poor family thus to herd together. It is by no means an uncommon occurrence for a grown-up girl to sleep with her father and mother, or with her brothers:—a poor married couple will even share their bed with a male friend;—and no shame is known!

Who can define where the shades of doubtful honesty and confirmed roguery meet and blend in these low lodging-houses? The labouring man is in nightly company with the habitual thief—his wife and his as yet uncorrupted daughter are forced to associate with the lowest prostitutes. How long will that wife remain faithful—that daughter taintless? The very children who breathe that infected atmosphere soon become lost, and triumph in their degradation!

The principal frequenters and patrons of these

low lodging-houses are regular customers, and consist of thieves, prostitutes, beggars, coiners, burglars, and hawkers. The casual lodgers are labouring men and their families whom poverty compels to sleep in such horrible places.

The hawkers make a great deal of money. They can buy steel-pens for 9d. a gross, pocket-books for 3d. each, snuff-boxes for 6d. each, and penknives for 4½d. each. On every article they can gain one hundred per cent. Many of these hawkers consider nine or ten shillings to be only a reasonable, and by no means a good, day's work.

Some of the women who frequent the lodging-houses in Castle Street and elsewhere, and who have no children of their own, hire infants for 4d. or 6d. a day, and obtain in the shape of alms at least four or five shillings a day each. Females of this class care not whether their husbands or lovers work or remain idle; for they boast that they can keep them—and keep them well, too. Some of these women knit caps in the streets; and they make more money than those who merely trust to the children accompanying them as the motive of charitable persons' compassion.*

In the low lodging-houses of Castle Street, and wherever else they may be found, the most frightful dissipation as well as the most appalling immorality prevails. Drunkenness is the presiding genius of these dens.

And how much has **STRONG DRINK** to answer for?

It is strong drink that helps to fill the gaols—the hulks—the asylums for the wretched, the diseased, and the insane. It is strong drink that calls forth so many sighs and such bitter tears—shortens existence—perpetuates family disease—and fosters maladies of all species and of all kinds. Strong drink often places the criminal in the condemned cell, and reduces the beautiful girl to barter her charms for bread. Strong drink strews the land with old rags and bleaching bones.

Let Temperance and Moderation be the guides of all:—for what are the results of Intemperance and habitual Drunkenness? Behold them in all the poor and low neighbourhoods of London! And if you ask, reader, by what signs you are to recognise them, we will tell you:—by the leaden eyes—the tottering steps—the shaking limbs—the haggard countenances—the feverish brows—the parched lips—the dry and furred tongue—the hot and pestilential breath—and the tremulous voices, of the confirmed votaries of strong drink. Apoplexy—palsy—delirium tremens—enlarged liver—ossified

* A police-serjeant, from whom we have obtained much valuable information relative to the poverty, mendacity, immorality, and crime in London, one day informed us that he knew of two sisters, both single women, who were confined at about the same time, and who took it by turns to go out with the children. They passed the babies off as twins, and made upon an average seven shillings a day by this imposture. The money was spent in riotous living and debauchery, in the evening, along with their flash men, who existed in complete idleness, living, however, far better than many a poor tradesman. One evening, the police-serjeant above alluded to had occasion to visit the room which the sisters occupied at one of Thompson's houses in Castle Street (a robbery having been committed in the dwelling), and he found the two young women and their paramours at supper. On the table were a baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes, two quarts of porter, and a bottle of gin. One of the sisters is at the present moment a prostitute in Fleet Street.

heart—impaired digestion—yellow jaundice—cancerous stomach—and dropsy,—all these attend upon strong drink. And the hideous catalogue of evils includes, also, broken limbs—fearful accidents and gushing wounds,—as well as many of those hereditary maladies which are handed down from father unto son!

In an earlier chapter we ridiculed the phrase of "Merry England." Oh! is it merry to see so much misery—so much crime—so much oppression—so much sorrow—so much absence of sympathy? If all this be joyous, then, of a surety, is England the merriest country, and London the merriest city, on the face of the earth. If a man can find music in the cries that issue from our crowded prisons and the wails that flow from our barbarous workhouses, then may he dance long and heartily to that melody—for it never ceases. If poverty can excite felicitous sensations within him, heaven knows he need never be sad. If crime can bring smiles to his lips, his countenance need never wear a melancholy aspect. And if he can slake his thirst in the heart-wrung tears of human agony, he need never step out of his way to look for a fountain or a spring!

In this light, England is indeed merry; for the observer of human nature, as he walks through the crowded streets of London, is jostled and hemmed in by all the gaunt and hideous forms that bear the denominations and wear the characteristics of Crime—Poverty—Disease—Sorrow—and Despair!

Old Death knocked at the door of No. 23, Castle Street, and was instantly admitted by a tall, pale, and rather handsome girl, who exclaimed, "Ah! my fine fellow—I thought you would come."

"Is it you, Mutton-Face?" said Bones, with a grim smile.

"Me—and no one else," answered the girl. "But walk in."

Old Death accepted the invitation, and followed Mutton-Face Sal into a room where about two dozen persons, male and female, were crowded round a large fire.

One was a young man, of the name of Quin, and who obtained a handsome income by means of imposture. He was accustomed to appear in the streets as a wretched-looking, deplorable old man, bent double with age and infirmity, supporting himself on a stick, and crawling along in a painful manner at the slowest possible rate. He used to swallow a dose of some strong acid every morning to make himself look ghastly pale; and he succeeded so well in counterfeiting an aspect of the most lamentable nature, that he seldom returned to Castle Street at night with less than ten shillings in his pocket. He had now thrown off his disguise, and was whiling away the time, after a good supper, with a quart of egg-hot.

Next to him sat a young woman, stout, florid, and rather good-looking. She was in her stays and petticoat, having very quietly taken off her gown to mend a rent; and she experienced not the slightest shame at thus exposing all the upper part of her person to the mixed society present. Neither did they appear to think there was any thing at all remarkable in her conduct. How, indeed, could it be otherwise?—since she would presently undress herself entirely in that very room—and before all her companions, who would do the same—male and female—when the hour arrived to repair to the beds ranged along the wall. This girl was known as

Jane Cummins, and was the mistress of the impostor Quin.

Farther on was a fellow who was sitting upright enough in his chair then, but who appeared daily in the streets as a bent cripple. He was accustomed to go about imitating a cuckoo, by which avocation he made a good living. He invariably got drunk every night.

Next to this impostor was a little deformity who was tied round the body to his chair. He had no legs, and was dragged about the streets of a day in a kind of cart drawn by two beautiful dogs, and having a banner unfurled behind him. The woman in charge of No. 23 paid him the greatest attention—put him to bed at night—helped him to rise in the morning—carried him out to his vehicle—strapped him in—and saw him safe off on his excursion about the metropolis. He usually returned at four to his dinner, and did not go out afterwards. His "earnings" were on the average ten shillings a-day.

A woman of about thirty, dressed in widow's weeds, and far advanced in the family way, sat next to the little deformity. She had never been married, but was possessed of five children, who were now playing in one corner of the room. She was accustomed to take her stand in some public thoroughfare, with her children drawn up in a row; and this game she had carried on, at the time of which we are writing, for four years—rather a long period of widowhood. She disliked fine weather, because the hearts of the charitable are more easily touched by the spectacle of a "deserted family" standing in the midst of a pouring rain or on the snow; and she reckoned that in bad weather she could earn eight or nine shillings a-day. Every Saturday night she took her station in some poor neighbourhood—such as Church Street (Bethnal Green), Leather Lane, Lambeth Marsh, High Street (St. Giles's), or Clare Market; and on those occasions she often obtained as much as fifteen shillings. But then, as she very justly observed, Sunday was a day of rest; and so it was indeed to her—for she was in the habit of getting so awfully drunk every Saturday night, after her return home to Castle Street, that she was compelled to lie in bed all the next day until three or four o'clock, when she rose to a good dinner. She always kept herself and children remarkably neat and clean—not from any principle, but as a matter of calculation. Charitable people thought she was a good mother, and a deserving though distressed woman; and alms poured in upon her. When questioned by any individual who relieved her, she would reply that "her husband was a bricklayer who had fallen off a ladder and killed himself six weeks ago;" or that "he was an honest, hard-working man whose career was suddenly cut short by his being run over by a gentleman's carriage;" or some such tale.

Next to her sat a young woman who was wont to take her stand in the evening, after dusk, close by the entrance to Somerset House. In the summer she would hold a few flowers in her hand: in the winter, laces and bobbins; and her invariable cry was "Oh! pray, dear sir"—or "dear lady," as the case might be—"pray do assist me: I have only this moment come out of the hospital, and have nowhere to sleep." By these means she realized her five shillings in three or four hours, and hastened back to Castle Street to spend them with a worthless fellow—her paramour.

Another individual whom we must mention, was an elderly man, who in his youth had been apprenticed to a chemist. He obtained his living by displaying a fearfully ulcerated arm, having himself originally produced the sores by means of corrosive acids and by the juices of various plants—such as the ranunculus acris and sceleratus, the sponge-laurel, euphorbium, arum maculatum, &c. He regularly revived and aggravated the ulcers every time they began to heal, and his arm was really shocking to contemplate. He would take his stand before a window, and, raising his shirt-sleeve, display the ulcers, so that the ladies or gentlemen at the casement sent him out a sixpence or a shilling, as much for the purpose of getting rid of so loathsome a spectacle as through motives of charity. It was this man's boast that three hours in a fashionable street or square would produce him seven or eight shillings.

Another impostor present on this occasion was a man of about forty, who was a perfect adept in disguising his person, and who feigned a different malady for every change in his attire and outward appearance. At one time he was suffering from ophthalmia, produced by the application of irritants—such as snuff, pepper, tobacco, blue vitriol, salt, alum, &c. At another he would actually produce blindness for a time by the application of belladonna, henbane, or sponge-laurel; and then he was led about by a little boy. Again, he would appear as a miserable creature afflicted with a horrible jaundice—the yellow colour being produced by a dye. He was also perfect in the counterfeit of spasmodic complaints, paralysis, and convulsions. His earnings were usually considerable: but on one occasion, "when things were very bad," he obtained admission into a hospital as an epileptic patient; and so well did he assume the dreadful attacks at particular intervals, that he remained in the institution for several weeks.

Lying on one of the beds, in a filthy state of intoxication, was a miserable object who was accustomed to go about the streets on his hands and knees, holding iron grappels. His spine was bent upwards—rounded like that of a cat in a passion; and his legs were moreover deformed. His supine position was no counterfeit: he could not walk on his feet like other human beings. Thus far he certainly was an object of compassion: but in his character he was a worthless fellow—abusive, insolent, drunken, and addicted to thieving.

Sitting on another bed, and so far gone in liquor that he could scarcely hold the pipe he was smoking, sate a man about forty years of age, named Barlow. He had been a clergyman and was now a begging-letter impostor. He possessed an excellent address, and was most plausible in his speech as he was fluent with his pen; but the moment he obtained any money, he was never sober until it was spent. He had travelled all over England—knew every nobleman's or gentleman's country seat—and had carried on an excellent business by means of his begging-letters.*

A labouring man, his wife, and daughter were amongst this precious company. The girl was about fifteen, and tolerably good-looking. The family had been three days in that lodging-house; and she

already laughed at the obscene jest and applauded the licentious song.

Two or three hawkers—a couple of juvenile thieves—and some young girls, confirmed prostitutes, made up the amount of the precious company into whose presence Mutton-Face Sal had conducted Old Death.

Those who were acquainted with him saluted him respectfully; for he was a great man—a very great man—amongst persons of a particular class.

"Who is that horrible old wretch?" asked the labourer's daughter, in a whisper to Jane Cummins.

"The richest fence in London," returned the other in the same low tone of voice.

"And what's a fence, Miss?"

"A fence, you fool, is a buyer of stolen goods, as the beaks call it. That old covey is rolling in riches—shabby and mean as you see him. He has been at it, they tell me, upwards of thirty years, and has never got his-self lumbered yet. But the best of it is, no one knows where his stores are: no one even knows where he lives. He has certain houses of call; but the cunningest Bow Street Officer can't find out his abode."

"What do you mean by *lumbered*?" asked the girl, whose name was Matilda.

"Put into quod, to be sure. But how green you are. We must teach you what's what, I see that. Here—help me to put on my gown—it's mended now. Thank'ee. Now come with me to the window, and I'll tell you what a happy kind of life I lead—and how you may do the same if you like."

But even as she uttered these words, Jane Cummins heaved a sigh—although she strove hard to subdue it.

The girl walked aside with her; and they continued their conversation in whispers at the window.

"I'm afraid our Tilda'll get no good here," said the labourer, in a low tone, to his wife, as he glanced uneasily towards his daughter.

"Nonsense, you fool!" returned the woman. "You can't get no work—and we must starve if we don't do something. Our gal can keep us, if she will—and she must too. Sooner or later it will come to *that* with her—and as well now as ever."

The poor labourer sighed: he would have remained honest, and kept his wife and daughter so, if he could; but want and houseless wanderings in the cold street stared him in the face—and he resigned himself to the bitter destiny that was thus forced upon him and his family!

In the mean time Old Death had taken a seat near the fire, and was deep in a whispered conversation with Mutton-Face Sal.

"Where's Josh Pedler?" he asked.

"He'll be in shortly," was the answer. "He's only gone out to fetch something for his supper."

"And so Tim the Snammer is lumbered?" said Old Death.

"Yes: he's in Clerkenwell. But you'll get him off when he goes up again 'fore the beak on Saturday—won't you, old chap?—now, won't you?"

"I do n't know—I do n't know. He is n't one of my men: he never would give me a turn. His name does n't appear against a number on my list."

"But he will give you all his business in future, if you'll get him off this time—just this time," said the girl coaxingly.

* All the characters just depicted are real ones. Some of them are still about town.

"We shall see what Josh has to tell me—I never promise in a hurry," returned Old Death. "Besides, it's not the rule to assist a man that goes to others to do his business. Tim gets his notes changed at old Isaacs*—or at Milberry's†—or at Mrs. Davis's‡—or at Rayner's||—or——"

And as Old Death enumerated his competitors, telling them off on his fingers slowly, one after the other, his jealousy arose to such a pitch that the workings of his countenance became absolutely frightful.

"Now, what's the use of going on like this?" said Sal. "I tell you that Tim shan't have no more to do with them people, if you'll only get him off this time. None of them can do it as sure as you; and if you only tell me it shall be done, why—it's as good as done."

At this moment the door opened, and a tall, rather good-looking, but rakish and shabbily-dressed man, of about five-and-twenty, made his appearance.

"Here's Josh!" cried the girl.

The thief and Old Death exchanged greetings; and the latter proposed to adjourn to a public-house in the neighbourhood to talk over the business. Thither the two men, accompanied by Mutton-Face Sal, accordingly repaired; and Bones suffered himself to be persuaded to receive the three five-pound notes and the sovereign, mentioned in the flash letter, as the price of his endeavours to procure the discharge of Tim the Snammer.

The old man then took his departure, and Josh Pedler returned with Sal to the lodging-house.

CHAPTER XXV.

MATILDA, THE COUNTRY-GIRL.

IN the meantime Jane Cummins had been using all her eloquence for the purpose of inducing Matilda Briggs, the poor labourer's daughter, to become as bad as herself.

"You don't know what a pleasant life we lead," she repeated, when she had drawn the girl aside to the window. "Quin—my man—earns lots of money—and we know how to spend it. "To-night we'd a roast loin of pork and apple-sauce for supper at a slap-up eating-house: then we'd some rum-and-water: and then we came home here. Look how Quin's enjoying himself with that egg-hot. Is n't he a capital fellow to be able to get so much money—and all so easy too? and don't you think I'm happy to have nothing to do but to help him spend it?"

Again the young woman struggled fruitlessly to keep down a sigh; for—in reality—she loathed, she abhorred the life which she was leading.

"And what do you suppose will become of you and your father and mother?" she continued. "Why—if it was n't for that good-natured fellow Josh Pedler you'd have all been turned out last night into the streets. And when the woman came in just now to collect the three-pences, did n't he

take and pay for you and the old people? And did n't he give you all the grub you had to-day?"

"Why do you speak so much about *him*?" asked the country-girl.

"Oh! I do n't know—only because he seems to have taken a fancy to you," returned Jane Cummins. "And I tell you what it is—you may become his jomen if you like."

"His what?" said Matilda, blushing—for she half understood the meaning of the word.

"Why—his wife, over the left, if you choose," was the answer. "But what a fool you are! You're not so innocent as you pretend to be. Come—tell me—have you ever had a lover?"

"Never," replied the girl.

"Then it's high time you should. The truth is, Josh told me to sound you," she added in a mysterious manner; "and if you only say the word, we'll have a wedding here to-night. Josh has got plenty of money at this moment. He found a purse the day before yesterday——"

"Where?" inquired the country-girl.

"In a gentleman's pocket, at the theatre," returned Jane coolly; "and he talks of setting up a mint——"

"A mint! what with?" asked Matilda.

"With Queen's metal, to be sure," responded the other; "and I think he's a very thriving young fellow. You'd be as happy as a princess along with him;—and would n't he come out strong to-night with the lush, if you was to say *yes*."

"But my father—my mother——" murmured the girl hesitatingly.

"Oh! leave them to me!" said Jane Cummins.

"Go and sit down again—I'll manage the old woman—and she can manage the old man herself."

Matilda returned to her seat; and Quin, who could pretty well guess what his mistress had been about, handed the country-girl the quart-pot of egg-flip. She declined to partake of it; but he pressed her hard—and she drank a few drops.

"Oh! that's nothink—a mere taste!" cried Quin. "Take another sip. Come."

And she did as she was desired.

"Lord bless the girl—she's quite afraid of it!" said Quin. "But you must and shall have a good draught."

Resistance was vain: Quin held the pewter-pot to her lips, and forced her to imbibe a considerable quantity.

He then passed the measure to her mother, who did not require any entreaty to drink; and the labourer himself was not one likely to refuse good liquor when it was offered to him.

Quin thus got upon very pleasant terms with the poor family; and, making Briggs sit next to him, he began to chatter away in a familiar style, not forgetting to hand round the quart-pot at short intervals.

Meantime Jane Cummins had drawn Mrs. Briggs aside, and made certain representations to her—the result of which was that Matilda should that very night become the mistress of Josh Pedler. The arrangement was, however, to be kept quiet until Josh should return, for fear that he might have altered his mind since he spoke to Jane on the subject in the morning.

At length Pedler came back, accompanied by Mutton-Face Sal; and, as he entered the room, he exclaimed, "Well, pals, it's all right! Old Death

* A notorious fence living in Liqueurpond Street

† A flash public-house at the corner of Laurence Lane, St. Giles's.

‡ A fence living in Belson Street.

|| A stick-maker, and a noted fence, living in Coach and Horses Yard, Drury Lane.

has took it in hand—and so Tim is as good as out. I've ordered round a gallon of gin-punch to make merry in consequence."

This announcement was received with loud cheers.

"Come you here, Josh," cried Jane Cummins: "I want to say a word to you."

"Well—what is it?" demanded the thief.

"Oh! nothing bad," she replied, with a significant look at her paramour Quin, who laughed heartily—as if an excellent piece of fun were in preparation.

Jane then whispered a few words in Josh Pedler's ears: the man did not, however, wait to hear all she had to say; but, bursting away from her, caught Matilda Briggs in his arms, and, giving her three or four hearty smacks with his lips, shouted, "A wedding, pals! a wedding!"

"A wedding!" repeated those who were only now let into the meaning of all the mysterious whispering that had been going on—first between Jane and Matilda—then between Jane and Mrs. Briggs—afterwards between Mrs. Briggs and her husband—and lastly between Jane and Josh Pedler:—"a wedding!" they cried: "hooray!"

"Yes—a wedding, in right good earnest!" exclaimed Josh. "But where's that drunken old file Barlow?"

He's fallen asleep on his bed," observed Mutton-Face Sal.

"Then rouse him—and be damned to him!" cried Pedler.

Sal approached the bed, and speedily awoke the parson, who was at first mighty wroth at what he considered to be a very great liberty: but when he was informed that his services were required to perform a matrimonial ceremony—that he was to have five shillings for the job—and that a gallon of gin-punch was expected immediately, he uttered a tremendous oath by way of expressing his joy, and leapt up with as much alacrity as the fumes of liquor, which still influenced his brain, would permit him to display.

A circle was then formed, in the midst of which Josh Pedler, Matilda Briggs, and the begging-letter-impostor parson took their station. One of the hawkers produced a common brass ring, which he handed to Barlow, over whose person Quin threw a sheet by way of surplice, while another individual gave him an obscene book.

The greatest excitement now prevailed amongst the rogues and loose women present: and even Matilda herself entered into the spirit of the proceeding—for she was excited with the liquor which Quin had forced upon her. Her poor father alone experienced a qualm of conscience:—but he dared not utter a word calculated to betray his scruples or manifest his regrets—for his wife, of whom he stood in dread, cordially approved of the arrangement.

The drunken parson now commenced the ceremony; and assuming, as well as he could, the seriousness of former days, he recited the following slang chant:—

"I, parish prig and bouncing ben,
Do here, within this padding-ken,
Josh Pedler—if thou wilt agree—
Cop that young shaler unto thee.
To her a fancy bloak be thou:—
Tip mauleys—she's thy jomen now."

Barlow made the bride and bridegroom join hands, and then continued thus:—

"When thou art out upon the cross,
May she be faithful to thy doss.
If things go rough, and traps are nigh,
May she upon the nose be fly."

The company then repeated in chorus the last line; after which display of their vocal powers, the ceremony was continued by the parson in the following words:—

"If you should pinch a lob—or plan
A sneezer, or a randlesman—
Or work the buils and counters rum—
Or go the jump and speel the drum—
Or turn shop-bouncer at a pinch,—
Should you do this and get the clunch,
May she, while thou art lumbered, be
Stull true and faithful, Josh, to thee."

The parson paused for a few moments, and concluded with this distich:—

"Be witness, all, to what is said:—
And with this fawney ye are wed!"

Barlow handed Josh the ring, which the thief placed on the girl's finger, and then gave her a hearty kiss.

The spectators immediately set up a shout of acclamation; and at that instant the gin-punch made its appearance.

A scene of debauchery—noise—quarrelling—and ribaldry now followed. The parson was voted into the chair, which was constituted by the foot of one of the beds; and the punch went rapidly round in pewter-pots.

The bowl was soon emptied; whereupon Josh Pedler sent to the public-house and ordered another. The little deformity, without legs, sang a filthy song: even the man with the curved spine, and who went about on grappels, forgot his wonted ill-humour and insolence, and joined in the mirth.

The woman, who had charge of the house, was summoned; and, for a consideration of seven shillings and sixpence, she agreed to provide a separate room for the accommodation of the "happy couple."

* The following is a glossary which will enable the reader to comprehend the slang terms used in the thieves' marriage-service:—

Parish prig, clergyman.
Bouncing ben, learned man.
Padding-ken, lodging-house.
Cop, make over.
Shaler, girl—young lady.
Fancy bloak, paramour—fancy man.
Tip mauleys, shake hands.
Jomen, paramour—fancy girl.
On the cross, out thieving.
Doss, bed.
Traps, constables.
Upon the nose, on the watch.
Fly, alert.
Pinch a lob, rob a till.
Plan, steal.
Sneezer, snuff-box.
Randlesman, a silk pocket handkerchief.
Work the buils, pass bad 5s pieces (a favourite species with conners in those days).
Counters, sovereigns.
Turn, bad—spurs.
Go the jump, steal into a room through a window.
Speel the drum, run away with stolen property.
Shop-bouncer, shop-lifter.
Get the clunch, be locked up in gaol.
Lumbered, imprisoned.
Fawney, ring.

This amount was duly paid; and the woman was made drunk into the bargain for her trouble.

At length some one proposed a dance; to which the parson objected, and moved "another bowl of punch" as an amendment. Jane Cummins, however, put an end to the argument by undressing herself, and performing sundry saltatory evolutions in a complete state of nudity—an example which was very speedily followed by Mutton-Face Sal, whose grief for the loss of her paramour, Tim the Snammer, was temporarily drowned in punch. Even the woman in widow's weeds was about to adopt the same course; but she was too tipsy to accomplish her purpose, and, on rising from her chair, fell on one of the beds and into a profound sleep at the same time.

The noise, confusion, and disgusting licentiousness of the scene increased to an extraordinary degree; but Josh Pedler led Matilda away—or rather carried her; for the unfortunate girl was now in a complete state of intoxication.

* * * * *

Revolting as the contemplation of such a scene as that just described must be to the rightly-constituted mind, it was nevertheless requisite to introduce it into such a work as the present.

Its details prove how necessary it is to establish in the great metropolis cheap and well-conducted lodging-houses for the use of poor but honest families.

This cannot be done by private speculators, because an efficient management could only be secured by legislative enactment.

The Government, then, should direct its attention to this very important subject.

A poor man is compelled to quit his native town or village in the provinces, and comes to London to seek for work. He is accompanied by his wife and daughter. Penury compels him to fix upon the cheapest lodging he can find; and a cheap lodging-house cannot be a respectable one. Its landlord and landlady have neither the time nor the means—even if they possess the inclination—to discriminate between the various applicants for admission:—on the contrary, they are well aware that the worst characters are most likely to prove their best customers. Their only consideration is to make their establishment answer; and so long as their lodgers pay for the accommodation they seek, no questions can be asked.

To such a den, therefore, is the poor man forced to take his wife and his daughter. The obscene language which falls upon this young girl's ears—the fact of being compelled to lay aside her garments in the presence of several males, who unconcernedly undress themselves before her—the debauchery of the day—the licentiousness of the night,—to all these elements of ruin is she immediately exposed. A veil drops suddenly, as it were, from before her eyes; and she finds herself hemmed in by moral corruption—surrounded by temptation—excited by new desires—and encouraged to go astray by her companions. How can she leave that sink of impurity, otherwise than impure? how can she quit that abode of infamy, otherwise than infamous? Many a high-born lady has succumbed to the seducer under circumstances less venial,—under influences admitting a far less amount of extenuation!

Were the Government, with the consent of the Legislature, to establish lodging-houses for poor but honest persons, an immense benefit would be conferred upon that class, and the fearful progress of immorality would receive a check at least in one point. The respectability of such institutions might be ensured by placing trustworthy married couples at their head, and applying a system of rules which would enforce regular hours, exclude ardent spirits, and only permit a moderate quantity of beer to be brought in for the use of each individual, and likewise empower magistrates to punish those who might be brought before them charged with breaking the regulations, or otherwise subverting the wholesome discipline enjoined.

Thieves, prostitutes, and bad characters would not attempt to obtain admission to establishments of this description:—no more than a person enjoying a competency would endeavour to become the inmate of a workhouse. Scenes of debauchery and unbounded license alone suit abandoned males and females;—and thus every guarantee would exist for the respectable management of those institutions which would save the honest poor from the low lodging-houses of London.*

* When Mr. Mills was instructed to draw up his "Report on Prison Discipline," he obtained the necessary information and evidence from a variety of sources. One of the witnesses whom he examined was Inspector Titterton of the Metropolitan Police Force. This intelligent officer deposed as follows:—"St. Giles's abounds with low lodging-houses. The most notorious are kept by Grout. He is a rich man, and has elegant private houses at Hampstead, and the lowest sort of lodging-houses in every part of London. He generally visits these dens daily;—keeps his horse and gig. Price of these houses, as all others, three pence or fourpence a night in a room with a score or two of other people. Men and women sleep together anyhow. A man and woman may have a place screened off, which they call a room, for eightpence a night; but they are seldom so delicate. These houses are brothels. Grout is the monopolist of low lodging-houses. The St. Giles's prostitutes commit many robberies upon drunken countrymen whom they entice to those places, and either bully or *hockuss* them. The last is to stupefy them with opium or laudanum in their drink. Girls club, and keep a man between them. Inspector has known instances of girls robbing men even of their clothes. In one case the victim had been deprived absolutely of his shirt, because it was a good one: this man the inspector carried home in a policeman's great coat. At the census Grout returned that 140 persons slept in one of his houses in Laurence Lane. His ground-landlord is Nugee, the great tailor. The lodging-houses in St. Giles's are like rabbit-burrows: not an inch of ground is lost; and there are stairs and passages innumerable. While Grout is thus the landlord of hundreds and hundreds of thieves, vagrants, and prostitutes, he lets his beautiful Hampstead villas to genteel and fashionable families."

We have already shown that Thompson was (and perhaps is still) a lodging-house proprietor in a considerable way of business. A person named Southgate is also eminent in the same line. He possesses houses which make up altogether 309 beds. These houses are as follow:—Nos. 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9, Charles Street, Long Acre; seven houses on Saffron Hill; five in Mitre Court, St. John Street, Clerkenwell; No. 11, New Court, Cow Cross, Smithfield; and two in Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell. These last are exclusively occupied by Italian boys and their masters. A man named Elliott has also lodging-houses in Charles Street: namely, Nos. 23, 24, and 45. In Shorts' Gardens, a person called "Lucky Dick" has Nos. 8 and 9.

An officer whom Mr. Mills examined, deposed thus:—"To return to lodging-houses, there are cheap ones in all towns; most of them have two sorts of kitchens. The labourers and hawkers live in a better room, and pay fourpence a night for their bed, halfpenny for coals, half-



CHAPTER XXVI. THE LADY'S-MAID.

In the meantime Mr. Frank Curtis had met the buxom Charlotte, according to appointment, in Conduit Street.

The youthful lady's-maid, who had not numbered quite nineteen years, but who concealed a warm temperament and a disposition ripe for wanton mischief, beneath a staid and serious demeanour, when in the presence of her mistress or of those in whose eyes it was prudent to be looked upon as "a very prudent and steady young woman,"—the youthful lady's-maid, we say, walked quietly along the street,

penny for the use of plates and hot water, and a halfpenny for the cooking apparatus. Regular beggars, the low sort of cadger fellows, live in the other kitchen, and pay a halfpenny for coals, and have nothing found them. The beggars go on very bad at night in the lodging-houses. They can make 5s. a day in the country by begging, let alone what they make by thieving. They never think of work, unless they can contrive to carry something in hopes of an opportunity to slip off with it."

And it is in such dens as these that honest poverty must seek shelter and a bed

and pretended not to notice Mr. Curtis, who was leaning against a lamp-post, smoking a cigar.

But the light of the lamp fell upon her pretty countenance; and he, having immediately recognised her, stretched out his hand and caught her by the shawl, saying, "Well, Miss—do you mean to pretend you did n't see me?"

"Lor'! you there now!" exclaimed Charlotte, affecting to be quite surprised at this encounter.

"Just as if you thought I should n't come!" cried Frank, laughing. "But take my arm, my dear; and though this very arm has often supported duchesses—and marchionesses—and even on one occasion the young and beautiful queen of the Red-Skin Indians,—yet I do n't know that it was ever more agreeably pressed than by your pretty little fingers."

"How fine you do talk!" said Charlotte, by no means displeased with the compliment. "But where are you going?"

"Oh! I'll show you, my dear," returned Frank, as he led her along. "And now tell me—has anything happened in respect to you know what?"

"Yes—a great deal," answered Charlotte. "But

here I am walking with a gentleman whose very name I don't even know! Isn't it odd?"

"Very, my dear. I will, however, soon satisfy you on that head. My name is *Mr. Curtis* to the world—but *Frank* to you; and some day or another I hope to be Baron Dumphington. But what was it that you had to tell me?"

"Something about Miss Mordaunt," replied the girl, who firmly believed the Dumphington story and entertained a proportionate amount of respect towards the young gentleman who was heir to so honourable and distinguished a title.

"Come—out with it, my dear," exclaimed Frank. "Business first, and love afterwards—as my dear lamented friend the Prince of Cochin-China used to say when we were intimate together in Paris, before he hung himself for love in his garters."

"Did he, though?" cried the lady's-maid. "How shocking!"

"Shocking enough, my dear. But pray tell me what you have to say about Miss Mordaunt."

"Why, sir," resumed Charlotte, "this evening when I was dressing her for dinner, she began to sound me about how I liked my place in Lady Hatfield's service, and whether I should be glad to better myself. So, keeping in mind what you had told me to do, I seemed to fall in to all she asked me, and gave her to understand that I should n't object to better myself. Then she began to simper and smile, and at last let out plump that she was going to run away with a gentleman—but she did n't say who—to-morrow night."

"That gentleman, my dear, is an uncle of mine," said Curtis.

"I'll be bound, then, it's the same Sir Christopher Blunt—"

"The very same, my dear. But go on: you speak almost as well as I did when I was in Parliament—or as my uncle the Earl of Dumphington."

"Do I, though? Well," continued Charlotte, "and so Miss Mordaunt told me how she could n't think of travelling alone with the gentleman, and that she must have a lady's-maid—"

"And you agreed to go with her?" cried Frank.

"I did," answered Charlotte; "and we settled and arranged every thing quite comfortable."

"Did she tell you where she is to meet my uncle to-morrow night?" inquired Frank.

"No: but she told me to mind and be ready to leave in the evening at about seven o'clock," returned Charlotte.

"Well—fortunately I *do* know where they are to meet—and that's close by the turnpike at Islington Green," said Frank. "She's to go up in a hackney-coach, and be there punctual at eight o'clock; and the old chap is to have the post-chaise and four in readiness. Does n't he already fancy himself tearing along the great north road, as if the devil was after him! And so nice too did he arrange his plans with his Julia, that there's to be a supper prepared for them at St. Alban's—and off again! Egad! he's settled it pleasant enough: but I'll be even with him!"

"What do you intend to do?" asked Charlotte.

Curtis did not immediately reply; but, after a few moments' consideration, he abruptly exclaimed, "Can you trust any female friend of yours in this business?"

Well—I don't know—unless it is my own

sister Alice, which is a very nice girl, and will do any thing I tell her," was the reply.

"The very thing!" ejaculated Frank. "Is she out at service?"

"No—she's at home with mother," answered Charlotte.

"And will she just consent to take a short ride in a post-chaise and four along with you, if I give her a five-pound note?" demanded Frank.

"To be sure she will," returned Charlotte, who, with the quickness of female perception, began to comprehend Mr. Curtis's design.

"Then I'll tell you how we must contrive it," said Frank. "It's of the greatest consequence to me, my dear, to prevent this marriage: and if I can only expose my stupid old uncle, I shall fairly laugh him out of it. Now, don't you think you could manage to pass yourself off as his Julia, and get your sister to play the part of yourself, as far as St. Alban's? and I would be there with three or four friends of mine—all jolly dogs—ready to receive Sir Christopher and you girls. You might cover your face well with a thick veil; and as he will be sure to hurry you into the post-chaise the moment you get down from the hackney-coach just beyond the turnpike on the Green, you need n't speak a word. Then you can pretend to be so overcome with fear and anxiety—"

"Oh! leave all that to me!" exclaimed Charlotte, who relished the joke amazingly. "But what shall I do about my place at Lady Hatfield's?"

"Dence take your place, my dear!" cried Frank.

"I'll secure beautiful lodgings for you in some nice, quiet, retired street at the West End, and you shall be as happy as the day's long. We'll have such fun together—and I'll take you to plays and all kinds of amusements. Lord bless you! I think no more of a cool thousand or two than I should of blowing out a chap's brains if he was to insult you."

"Oh! dear me, do n't talk so horrid!" exclaimed Charlotte, laughing. "And you really will do all you say—if I help you in this business?"

"Yes—and much more," returned Frank. "And now the only thing to manage, is to prevent Miss Mordaunt keeping the appointment by herself. Oh! I have it!" he exclaimed, after a minute's reflection. "I can imitate my uncle's handwriting to a *t*. He writes just as if he had a skewer instead of a pen—and so do I, for that matter. So I'll just tip Miss Julia a note to-morrow afternoon about four, as if it came from Sir Christopher; and I'll tell her in it that the elopement must be postponed until the next night. Egad! this is a stroke of policy that beats hollow any thing my cousin the Duke of Dumphington ever did."

"I thought he was your uncle, sir?" remarked Charlotte.

"I meant my uncle, love," replied Frank: "but it's all the same. The Marquis of Dumphington is my relation—and that's enough. And now, my sweet creature, that we have settled all this business—suppose we adjourn to a nice quiet place that I know—"

"But I must see my sister to-night and tell her all that there is to be done," interrupted Charlotte.

The fact is that the pretty lady's-maid had kept the appointment given her by Frank Curtis, with the full intention of abandoning her person to him for she was alike wanton in her passions and mer-

cenary in her disposition; and the five guineas which he had given her in the morning had stimulated her with the desire of making farther inroads upon his purse. Nay—she had even hoped that he would fulfil the sort of promise he had given her at their previous interview, and, in plain terms, establish her as his mistress in a comfortable manner. But the intrigue just concocted for the purpose of defeating the matrimonial design of Miss Mordaunt and Sir Christopher Blunt, had engendered new ideas in the breast of the lady's-maid; and she resolved that her intimacy with Mr. Curtis should progress no farther for the present.

The young man, who at this moment cared much more for the success of his scheme against his uncle than for the attractions of Miss Charlotte Styles, willingly allowed her to repair at once to the abode of her mother for the purpose of tutoring Alice how to play the part which that younger sister was to enact in the great drama planned by Mr. Curtis.

Charlotte accordingly separated from Frank, with a promise to write to him if any thing should go wrong; but with an understanding, on the other hand, that her silence was to be construed by him into a proof that all was progressing favourably to his views.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LONDON ON A RAINY EVENING.—A SCENE IN A POST-CHaise.

LONDON has a strange appearance on those evenings—so peculiar to our climate—when a cold, drizzling, mist-like rain is falling. The lustre of the gas-lights in the shops is seen dimly, as if through a gauze; and the lamps in the streets have an air as though they struggled to preserve themselves from total extinction. Clogs and pattens create a confused rattling on the pavement; and to a bird's-eye view, such crowded thoroughfares as Cheapside, Fleet Street, the Strand, and Holborn, must appear to have their *trottoirs* arched with umbrellas.

Then aristocracy seems to urge the horses of its carriage more quickly on, as it whisks to the club, the Parliament, or the dinner-party:—the member of the middle class buttons his *tagliioni* or his great-coat over his chest;—the individual of a humbler sphere tries to make his scanty tweed cover as much of his person as it will;—and poverty wraps its rags around its shaking limbs, apparently forgetful that in drawing them over one place they leave another bare.

In the entrances of courts and covered alleys and in deep doorways the "daughters of pleasure" (oh! the frightful misnomer!) collect and huddle together in their flaunting attire, the pattering of the rain rendering their poor thin shoes as pulpy as brown paper, and splashing over their stockings—and thus aiding ardent spirits and nights of dissipation to plant the seeds of consumption more deeply in their constitutions.

The drivers of cabs and omnibuses thrust their heads as far into their hats—or else push their hats as far down on their heads—as possible; and, shrugging up their shoulders, sit with rounded backs and faces bent downward, on their vehicles;—while the conductors or omnibus-cads, in their oil-skin coats, seem to find consolation for the un-

pleasantness of the weather in the fact that they can speedily fill their vehicles without the usual exercise of the lungs or gymnastic movements of the arm.

And, on a rainy evening such as we are attempting to describe, what business—what bustle prevail in front of the Angel Inn at Islington! Omnibus after omnibus comes up, from every direction, discharging and receiving their animated freight with wonderful rapidity. The red-nosed man at the booking-office seems to have something better to do than merely lounge at the threshold, with his right shoulder leaning against the door-post off which it has worn the paint in one particular spot: for inquiries now multiply thickly upon him. Indeed, we are afraid that that last share of "a quartern and two outs" which he took with the Elephant and Castle six o'clock cad, has somewhat obfuscated his ideas: for he thrusts an elderly lady with a band-box into a Chelsea, although she particularly requested to be placed in a Bank omnibus; and he has sent that tall lady with her three children and a baby over to Kennington, in spite of her thrice repeated anxiety to repair to Sloane Square.

What a paddling and stamping of feet, and pattering of clogs, and collision of umbrellas there are in every direction,—up the New Road, and down the City Road,—along St. John Street and Goswell Street Road,—and also up towards the Green! The most addle-pated writer may find some food for his pen, if he only take his stand at the Angel door—with a cigar in his mouth, too, if he like—on a rainy evening.

Does he wish to see how a party of pleasure may be spoiled by a change in the weather? Let him study that little procession of a family who have passed the day at Copenhagen House, and are now returning home, wet—cold—uncomfortable—and sulky: the husband dragging the chaise, in which two children are squalling—a lubberly boy of eight or nine pushing behind—and the wife, with a baby on one arm, and holding up her gown with the left hand, paddling miserably through the rain, and venting her ill-humour on her husband by declaring that "it was all his fault—she knew how it would be—she had begged and prayed of him to come home an hour before—but he *would* stay to have that other glass of gin-and-water!"

If our moralist, whom we station at the door of the Angel, be an admirer of pretty feet and ankles, he may now gratify his taste in that respect; for, of a surety, those who have good ones raise their dresses above the swell of the leg. Ah! ladies—it is really too bad of you:—we almost suspect that you care little for the rain, since it enables you to display those attractions!

The policeman, with his oil-skin cape, emerges from the public-house close by, drawing the back of his hand across his lips, just for all the world as if he had been taking "something short" to keep the cold out;—and very likely he has, too—for we are sure that the most rigid disciplinarian of an inspector or serjeant would not quarrel with him for so doing on such an unpleasant evening. The apple-stall woman puts up an umbrella, and maintains her seat on the low basket turned bottom upwards; for she dares not absent herself from her post, for fear of the hungry urchins that are prowling about.

Within the door-way of the Angel a knot of young gentlemen, in pea-coats, and with sticks in

their hands, are smoking cigars. They are not waiting for the omnibuses, but are merely collected there because the bustle of the scene amuses them, and they like to "look at the gals." Listen a moment to their conversation:—they are talking about some favourite actress at an adjacent theatre—and, to hear their astute observations, one would think that they must at least be the dramatic-critics of the newspapers assembled there. Or else, perhaps, their discourse turns on politics; and, then, one would be apt to imagine that they were Under-Secretaries of State in disguise, so profound are their remarks! They call the Minister of the day by his surname without any titular adjunct; and one of them, no doubt wiser than the rest, shakes his head solemnly, and very kindly prophesies the said Minister's approaching downfall. Then the conversation flies off at a tangent to some less important subject; and they most probably proceed to comment upon the "excellent lark" they had the other night at such-and-such a place. Presently one of them proposes a "go of whiskey" each; and they accordingly adjourn to the public room of the Angel, where, what with the goes of whiskey and the going of their tongues, they create so much noise that the old gentleman at the next table flings down the last Sunday's paper in despair, before he has read through the third murder.

Well, reader, it was on such a rainy evening as this that two grand events in our history were to take place:—we mean the affair of Sir Christopher Blunt on the one hand, and the project of Old Death to kidnap Charley Watts on the other.

It is our intention, however, to proceed with the former little business in this chapter.

At a quarter to eight o'clock a post-chaise and four passed through the turnpike at Islington, and drew up in the lower road, alongside the enclosure of the Green.

The right-hand window was then lowered; and a head, enveloped in a fur travelling-cap, with lap-pets over the ears and tying under the chin, was protruded forth.

This head—which belonged to Sir Christopher Blunt—looked anxiously up and down the thoroughfare, and was then withdrawn again.

But the worthy knight's patience was not tested to any great extent; for in a few minutes after his arrival at the appointed spot, and before the clock had struck eight, a hackney-coach rattled up to the place where the chaise was waiting.

Sir Christopher threw open the door of the chaise, kicked down the steps, and leaped out with the agility of a small elephant; and in a few moments he very gallantly handed two females, well muffled up in cloaks, boas, and veils, from the hackney-coach.

"Dearest Julia!" he murmured to the taller of the two, as he assisted her to ascend into the post-chaise.

An expressive squeeze of the hand was the reply to this affectionate apostrophe on the part of the knight.

The shorter female, whom Sir Christopher concluded to be his fair one's attendant,—inasmuch as Miss Mordaunt had informed him, by note in the morning that she had secured a faithful maid to accompany her,—was also handed into the post-chaise: the knight followed—and the vehicle hurried away like wild-fire.

Sir Christopher and the female whom he believed to be Miss Mordaunt, sate on the back seat, and the other young lady occupied the seat facing them.

For some time there was a dead silence inside the chaise; but at the expiration of about ten minutes, Sir Christopher began to fidget like a gentleman at a public dinner, who, though "unaccustomed to public speaking," nevertheless experiences a nervous anxiety to address the audience.

"My dear Julia—ahem!" began the knight: "I hope you—you do n't feel cold, dear?"

The female thus addressed threw her arms round Sir Christopher's neck, and clasped him so fondly that, what with the tightness of the embrace and the contact of the fur in which she was enveloped, he might have been pardoned had he fancied for a moment that he was being hugged by a bear.

"Oh! dearest Julia—how happy I am!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, nearly suffocated by this display of fondness. "And you, Julia—are you happy, my love?"

"Quite—too happy!" murmured his companion.

"And yet—methinks your voice sounds strange, Julia," said the knight. "What—what is the matter with you?"

"Only this, Sir Christopher—that I am not Miss Mordaunt—"

"Not Miss Mordaunt!" ejaculated the knight, preparing to throw down the window and order the postillions to stop.

"No—not Miss Mordaunt," was the answer: "but one who loves you as well—or better—and is, I flatter myself, six times as good-looking."

"Then who are you, in the name of heaven?" cried the knight, so completely bewildered that he knew not how to act.

Charlotte—for it was she—threw back her veil, and, by the light of the shops which they were just passing in the outskirts, Sir Christopher recognised Lady Hatfield's dependant, whom he had seen on two or three occasions when he had called on Miss Mordaunt in Piccadilly.

"And who is your companion?" he demanded hastily.

"My sister Alice—at your service," replied Charlotte. "But listen to me for one moment, Sir Christopher!"

"Well—for one moment, then," said the knight, so strangely perplexed and annoyed that he could take no decisive step.

"Miss Mordaunt never loved you, Sir Christopher," continued the wily Charlotte.

"Never loved me! Then why did she tell me so?"

"Only to laugh at you. It was all planned between her and your nephew Mr. Frank Curtis—"

"The devil!" ejaculated the knight. "Go on."

"They determined to make themselves merry at your expense, and yourself ridiculous at the same time."

"By heaven! I will be revenged!" cried the hero of this pleasant adventure, slapping his thigh emphatically with his open palm.

"They accordingly hired me and my sister to personate Miss Mordaunt and a lady's-maid," proceeded Charlotte; "and we were to carry on the deceit till we got to St. Alban's, where Mr. Frank Curtis and a party of his friends are already waiting to receive you."

"The villain!" shouted Sir Christopher, completely deceived by this plausible tale.

"But I always admired you, sir," continued Charlotte; "and I was resolved not to be made a party to carry out the trick to the end. I should have written to you—or called to explain it—but I feared you might not believe me;—and so I thought it best to let matters go as far as they have gone now, just to convince you that what I say is perfectly true."

"Oh! I believe it all—it is too clear—too apparent!" exclaimed the knight. "That scoundrel Frank—I'll discard him—I'll stop his allowance—I'll never speak to him again! To get a party of friends to meet us at St. Alban's—eh? Just where I'd sent word to have a good supper in readiness!"

"Miss Mordaunt told him all that, sir," observed Charlotte, who had kept one of her arms round the knight's neck, and had gradually approached her countenance so closely to his that her breath now fanned his cheek.

"Yes—I understand it all!" cried Sir Christopher. "I have been grossly deceived—vilely treated—basely served! But I am not the man to put up with it. At the same time, Miss," he added, in a softening tone, "you are a very good girl to have saved me from cutting so ridiculous a figure at St. Alban's!"

"I have only done my duty, sir," murmured Charlotte, with a profound sigh; and—of course by accident—her cheek touched that of the knight.

"A good girl—a very good girl!" repeated Sir Christopher. "as good as you are pretty—for you are pretty—and I've often remarked it."

The arm thrown around Sir Christopher's neck pressed him gently.

"And I really do not know how to reward you sufficiently, my dear girl," he added, new ideas entering his mind.

Again the arm pressed him tenderly.

Sir Christopher could resist the exciting contiguity no longer; and he fairly kissed the cheek that was so close to his lips.

Charlotte sighed again, but did not withdraw her face.

"Really this is very ridiculous!" exclaimed the knight. "Here we are, galloping along like lightning—and without any particular object that I know of. Upon my word, I have a great mind—a very great mind to revenge myself on both Miss Mordaunt and Master Frank at one and the same time!"

"In what way, Sir Christopher?" asked Charlotte, in a languidly murmuring tone.

"By marrying you, my dear," was the emphatic response.

"Oh! Sir Christopher—is it possible—such happiness!" sighed Charlotte, again embracing him in the most tender manner.

"It is so possible, my dear," answered the knight, "that if you consent to have me, the horses' heads need not be turned back again towards London."

"How can I refuse you, dear Sir Christopher?" exclaimed Charlotte;—"I, who always thought what a fine-looking—handsome—kind—genteel—fashionable man you was from the first time I ever saw you!"

"I'm sure I always heard sister speak in the highest terms of you, sir," said Alice, now taking up her cue.

"Well, then, my dear—what is to hinder us from being happy?" cried Sir Christopher.

With these words, he pulled down the window, ordered the postillions to stop, and gave them directions to change their route in such a manner as to avoid St. Alban's.

The vehicle then whisked along with renewed speed; and while Sir Christopher felt wonderfully elated at the idea of punishing his nephew and avenging himself on Miss Mordaunt by showing her that she was not the only female in the world to whom he was compelled to address himself,—Charlotte, on the other hand, rejoiced at the success of a scheme which had been suggested by the part she was originally engaged to play in this pleasant drama, and which, as the reader will now perceive, was the motive that prevented her from extending her intimacy with Mr. Frank Curtis on the previous evening.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TOM RAIN'S LODGINGS IN LOCK'S FIELDS.

NEARLY opposite to the house where Tom Rain lived, in Brandon Street, Lock's Fields, there was a boozing-ken, well known to Old Death; and shortly after nine o'clock on the same evening which marked the events related in the preceding chapter, that cunning fence, accompanied by Toby Bunce and the lad Jacob, were introduced by the landlord into a front room on the first-floor of the said flash establishment.

Jacob was ordered to station himself at the window and watch for Tom Rain to take his departure on the expedition devised for him by Old Death; while Bones himself and his acolyte Toby seated themselves opposite a cheerful fire, to discuss hot gin-and-water until the hour should arrive for putting into execution the scheme that had brought them thither.

Although the rain was falling with a mist-like density, and no gas-company had been enterprising enough to lay down pipes in such a neighbourhood as Lock's Fields,—so that there were neither stars nor lamps to light the street,—still the eagle-eyes of Jacob could distinguish sufficient of the scene without, to quiet any fear lest the movements of Tom Rain should escape him. Old Death moreover stimulated his energies by means of a sip of hot grog; and the lad remained as motionless at the window and as earnestly intent on his object as a cat watching near the hole into which a mouse has escaped.

"Well," said Old Death, as he sipped his liquor complacently, "I suppose we shall have no difficulty in managing this little job by-and-by? Jacob watched all day long in Great Ormond Street, until we joined him to come over here; and the Jewess never stirred out once—did she, Jacob?"

"No—not once," was the answer.

"But you knew that she was at home?"

"Yes: because I saw her at the window for a moment, every now and then," replied the lad, speaking without averting his eyes from the street.

"Good!" exclaimed Old Death. "It is not at all likely that she has come over to Tom's lodgings this evening, or that she will come—specially after the long sermon she wrote——"

Bones checked himself; for he was not in the habit of being communicative with Toby Bunce; and Toby, on his side, never sought to pry into the motives or designs of the old fence by whom he was made so complete a tool.

"Who is there in the house besides Mr. Rainford and the boy?" asked Toby, after a pause.

"Only the old widow woman that keeps it," responded Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"There!" cried Jacob, suddenly: "the door opens—and Mr. Rainford comes out! He's gone."

"All right!" said Old Death. "I suppose he's going for his horse, wherever he keeps it."

"I could see by the light in the passage, when the door was opened, that he had his white coat on and his great riding-whip in his hand," remarked Jacob. "It was a woman that held the candle—because I could just catch a glimpse of her shadow, and that's all."

"You don't think it was the Jewess?" asked Bones.

"I could n't say, because the shadow was n't plain enough," returned Jacob. "But it's hardly probable that she could have got over here before us, even if she was coming to Mr. Rainford's lodgings to-night."

"Well said, Jacob," observed Old Death. "You're getting a knowing lad—you are; and now you shall have a glass of grog to yourself."

"What! a whole glass?" ejaculated Toby Bunce, in astonishment at this unwonted liberality on the part of Old Death.

"Yes—a whole glass—a sixpenny glass," responded Bones; and, having summoned the landlord, he gave the requisite order.

The liquor was brought for Jacob's express behoof; and Old Death drew forth the money to pay for it. But, as he did so, a paper with writing upon it fell upon the floor, unperceived by any one save Jacob.

The lad instantly drew a chair near the fire, and as he seated himself, placed his foot upon the paper, which, being somewhat dingy in hue, he took to be a bank-note.

The landlord withdrew; and the conversation was resumed between Old Death and Toby Bunce.

"I hope Betsy will have something nice for supper when we get back again," remarked the latter.

"She's sure to do that," replied Old Death. "You ought to be very fond of your wife, Toby—for she's very fond of you."

"D'ye think she is, Mr. Bones?" exclaimed Bones.

"I'm sure of it. Does n't she take great care of you?"

"Rayther too much," was the reply, which came from the bottom of Toby's heart: then, perceiving that he had uttered something which seemed to imply that he had dared to form an opinion for himself, he hastened to add, "Not but what it's very kind of her to keep the money—and my watch too—and every thing else in her own care, because I know I'm an old fool—"

"No—you're not a fool, Toby," interrupted Bones; "but you want looking after. Ah! it was a blessed day for you when I recommended you to marry that virtuous—well-conducted—pattern-woman, as one may say, who is now your wife. I had no interest but your good—and hers—"

"I'm well aware of that, Mr. Bones," cried

Toby: "and you've been an excellent friend to us. I'm sure Betsy respects you as if you was her—"

Toby was about to say "father," but he remembered that Old Death did not like to be reminded of his age, and so he substituted "brother."

"Well—well," said Bones: "I've no doubt of what you tell me; and so long as you're happy together, that's every thing."

Toby smothered a sigh with a deep draught of gun-and-water;—Old Death poked the fire; and Jacob availed himself of the opportunity to stoop down and pick up the paper, which he dexterously conveyed to his pocket, unperceived by either of his companions. But a sudden disappointment seized upon him—for he could feel that it was too stiff for a bank-note, and was moreover folded like a letter.

The time passed away; and at length Old Death, after consulting his watch, declared it to be close upon eleven o'clock.

There were no lights visible in the house opposite; and it was therefore determined to commence operations without farther delay.

"Before we leave here," said Old Death, "remember what you are to do. Jacob and you, Toby, will put on your masks, rush in, shut the door, and make the old widow secure. Then you, Jacob, will come out and fetch me. It won't do for the woman to see me at all, because I'm so tall that if she described me to Tom Rain when he comes back, he would know who it was directly; but as there's nothing particular about either of you, he can't make you out from description."

"We'll take care, Mr. Bunce, how the thing is managed," said Toby.

The trio then quitted the public-house; and, while Toby and Jacob crossed to the other side of the street, Old Death walked a little way on.

The coast was quite clear, and a profound silence reigned throughout the neighbourhood.

Toby Bunce and the lad stopped at the door of the widow's house, slipped on their black masks, and knocked. In a few moments the door was opened by the widow herself. Quick as lightning, the candle was knocked from her hand, and the scream that half-burst from her lips was arrested by a large plaster which Toby instantaneously clapped upon her mouth. The poor woman fainted through excess of terror, and was borne into the nearest room, where Jacob hastened to strike a light.

Having succeeded thus far, Toby remained in charge of the landlady, while Jacob hastened to fetch Old Death.

In a few moments the lad returned with that individual; and the front-door was again carefully closed.

The widow continued in a swoon; and Toby did not give himself any trouble to recover her.

"Do you remain here," said Old Death, addressing himself to his myrmidon Bunce; "and if the woman revives and attempts to struggle or any nonsense of that kind, give her a knock on the head just to quiet her—but no more."

"All right," returned Toby, rejoiced to find that he had only a female to deal with.

Old Death then took the light, and, followed by Jacob, cautiously ascended the stairs.

They entered the front-room on the first-floor. It was a parlour, very neatly furnished: but no one was there.

"The boy must be in the back chamber," murmured Old Death; and thither they proceeded.

Having opened the door as noiselessly as possible, they advanced slowly into the room; but scarcely had the candle shed its light upon the bed, when they beheld the boy—the object of their enterprise—cradled on the bare and beautifully modelled arm of a female also wrapped in slumber, and whose coal-black hair spread itself over the white pillow, and partially concealed her glowing bust.

"The Jewess!" whispered Jacob, in a rapid, concentrated tone.

Old Death instantly shaded the light with his hand, and retreated from the room, followed by the lad.

But at that moment a loud knock at the front-door was heard; and simultaneously a piercing shriek burst from the apartment below, where Toby Bunce had been left in charge of the landlady.

Old Death muttered a terrible curse, extinguished the light, and hastened down stairs as noiselessly as possible—Jacob following with equal caution.

"The back way," murmured Old Death: "but first go and help Toby, who is in some trouble or another with the landlady."

Jacob darted into the front-room; and as it was quite dark, he stumbled over a chair.

The struggle between Toby and the landlady, who had succeeded in getting off the plaster, was now renewed; and, releasing her throat from the suffocating grasp which her assailant had upon it, she screamed for help a second time.

The knocking at the front-door was redoubled; and in a few moments a light gleamed from the head of the stairs.

"Perdition!" murmured old Death: "it is the Jewess!"

Then, rushing into the front room, he exclaimed, "Come off this moment!" and he was about to beat a retreat by the back way, when the house-door was forced in with a vigorous push.

"What the devil is doing here?" cried the well-known voice of Tom Rain, as he banged the door behind him and drew the bolt. "Who was screaming? What—?"

"Oh! Tom—is that you?" exclaimed a melodious, though excited voice on the stairs; "there are thieves—murderers in the house!"

And the half-naked lady, with her coal-black hair floating around her shoulders and over her bosom, suddenly appeared at the turning of the narrow staircase, holding a candle.

The light illumed the small passage below, and showed Tom Rain, standing with his back against the front-door, and with a pistol in each hand.

A third scream burst from the parlour.

Rainford rushed in; and, encountering Toby and Jacob, dragged them—or rather hurled them, as if they were two children in his grasp, into the passage.

There the light revealed to him their countenances—for their masks had been torn away in the struggle with the landlady; and Rainford was for a few moments so astounded at the recognition of Old Death's agents or confederates, that he was unable to utter a word.

"The villains!—the murderers!—the assassins!" cried the landlady, rushing forward, with her hair all in disorder, her garments torn to rags, and the blood streaming from her nose. "Shall I go and fetch a constable, Mr. Rainford?"

"No, I thank'ee," returned Tom: "leave me to manage these scoundrels. Here, my love," he continued, addressing himself to the Jewess, who had remained half-way up the stairs, "give me that light, and do you retire to your room. I must speak to these rascals in private. My good woman," he added, turning once more to the landlady, "have the kindness to go up stairs and keep my wife company; and fear nothing—now that I am here."

The two women hastened to obey these injunctions; and Rainford, provided with the candle, made an imperative sign for Toby Bunce and Jacob to precede him into the room from which he had dragged them a few minutes previously.

"Answer me directly," said Tom, in a stern—resolute manner, as he closed the door behind him, and deliberately drew forth the pistols which he had thrust into the pockets of his white great-coat when he first entered the parlour to rescue the landlady,—“answer me directly—either one of you, I care not which:—what brought you here?"

"Jacob knows best, Mr. Rainford," replied Bunce, eyeing the pistols askance.

"No—I do n't," said the lad, in a sulky tone.

"You are game to your employer, I have no doubt, Jacob," ejaculated Rainford. "And now, Toby Bunce, answer for yourself—or, by God! I'll shoot you through the head! In short, what brought you here?"

At this moment there was a low knock at the room-door, against which Tom Rain was leaning.

"Who's there?" demanded the highwayman.

"Me," replied the sepulchral, hollow voice of Old Death.

"Ah! the plot thickens," said Tom; and, opening the door, he gave admittance to Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"It's all a mistake, Tom—it's the wrong house!" exclaimed Old Death. "You do n't know how annoyed I am—you do n't indeed!"

"Well—I confess I do not," said the highwayman coolly; "and it will take you a long time to persuade me that you are speaking the truth. If it was the wrong house, why did n't these people of yours tell me so when I first questioned them?"

"Because I saw you would not believe me," cried Jacob hastily.

"And I was so flurried by them barkers," added Toby, pointing to the pistols.

"I'm not such a fool as you take me to be," observed Tom Rain. "Without being able to fathom your intentions, I can smell treachery as easy as I could gunpowder. How did you find out that I lived here? You must have had me dogged and watched, Old Death. And perhaps the very job you sent me after to-night, was a mere subterfuge to get me out of the way? Fortunately I did not wait for the yellow chaise, because I picked up something better the moment I reached Blackheath; and I thought I had done quite enough for one evening's work—so I returned without delay. Lucky it was that I did so. But am I to have an explanation of this affair?—or do you mean us to break with each other for good and all?"

"What can I say—what can I do to prove to you that this is all a mistake?" cried Old Death, sadly perplexed between the fear of complete detection and the dread of losing the valuable services of the highwayman.

"I will tell you," answered Tom, after a few

moments' consideration. "Let these two followers of yours go their ways—and you and me will have a little discourse in private."

A sudden misgiving—a horrible suspicion flashed to the mind of Old Death. Could Rainford mean to murder him?

"Why do you hesitate?" demanded the highwayman, penetrating his thoughts. "Do you suppose for an instant that I intend you any harm? Why, you miserable old wretch," he added, with a proud contempt which rendered him strikingly handsome for the moment, "I would sooner blow out my own brains than defile my hands by laying them violently on such a piece of withered carrion as you are—unless you give me ample cause."

Old Death's lips quivered with rage; but, subduing his emotions as well as he was able, he made a sign for Toby Bunce and Jacob to depart.

This hint was obeyed; and in a few moments Bones was alone in the room with the highwayman.

"What is it you require of me?" asked the old man, in a tremulous voice—for there was something in Rainford's tone and gesture which alarmed him.

"I will explain myself to you," said Tom. "When we first knew each other, you boasted that all your transactions were conducted with so much caution, that none with whom you had dealings even knew where you lived. Was it not so?"

"Very likely—very likely," returned Old Death. "But what of that?"

"Simply that as it suited you to keep your place of abode secret from me, so did I wish that my residence should remain unknown to you," answered Rainford. "Now, mark me, Mr. Bones—or whatever the devil your name may be—you shall have no advantage over me. Hitherto our compact has been fairly kept; but at length I find you practising falsely towards me. You need not interrupt me with vows and protestations—because I shall not believe you. But I tell you what you will do—and this night, too."

"What?" groaned Old Death.

"You will place us on even ground—you will give me the same advantage that you have gained over me: in a word, you will take me straight to the place where you live, and you will show me your stores where you keep all the property you receive or purchase from those who are in league with you."

"I—I have no stores," said Old Death; "and, as for my lodging—I—I have no settled place. I sleep sometimes in one crib—sometimes in another—"

"All lies!" ejaculated Tom, in a determined tone. "You have enormous dealings with all the housebreakers and thieves in London; you have said as much to me—and you have boasted that they are ignorant of your residence. Now then, you have a residence—and I swear that before I am six hours older, I will know so much about you, that you shall never dare to practise any treachery towards me."

"What treachery could I practise against you, Tom?" asked Old Death in a conciliatory tone.

"I will tell you," replied Rainford. "You boast that for thirty years you have monopolised the business of fence to all the people worth dealing with in London; and, during that time, you have never got into a scrape. But how could you have avoided

so wonderful a safety—so uninterrupted a security unless you now and then sacrificed—yes, *sacrificed*—an accomplice or two?"

"I!" ejaculated Old Death starting in spite of himself.

"Yes—you," rejoined Rainford, fixing his eyes sternly and searchingly on the ancient villain's Judean countenance. "Do you think that I am unacquainted with your real character? do you suppose that I was at a loss to understand you, even the very first moment we ever met? That flippancy of manner—that off-handedness—that reckless indifference, which characterise me, are a species of mask from behind which I can penetrate into the deepest recesses of the hearts of others. I know you as well as you know yourself—or nearly so. At all events, I know enough to render me cautious and wary; and, by the living God! you shall never have an opportunity of selling me to save yourself!"

"Tom—my dear Tom!" exclaimed Old Death, now actually frightened by the other's manner, and astonished at his words; "you cannot think of such a thing seriously!"

"So seriously do I think of it," replied Rainford, "that I will drag you into the pit, if I am destined to fall. So now, without another word, prepare to reveal to me all the mysteries in which you have for thirty years enveloped yourself."

"And if I refuse?" said Old Death, doggedly.

Rainford deliberately cocked his pistol.

"You have inveigled me into a snare—you have sent away those who might protect me—and now you seek an excuse to murder me!" exclaimed Old Death, his voice sounding like ringing metal.

"Did I not say ere now that I would not harm you, unless you gave me just cause?" demanded Rainford. "And think you that your refusal to comply with my present wish does not constitute such just cause? You have discovered my lodging, which it does not suit me to leave on that account:—you may also have found out that I am not *alone* here—"

"I know that a certain Jewess is your mistress," said Old Death, with a savage leer—for all the vindictive passions of his nature were aroused by the conduct of the individual who dared to coerce him—*him*, who had never been coerced before!

"A certain Jewess!" repeated Rainford, surveying Old Death with a singular expression of countenance.

"Yes—Esther de Medina," added Bones.

"Esther de Medina is as pure and innocent as the babe that is unborn!" cried the highwayman, with impassioned emphasis.

"Then she must be your wife," said Old Death.

"Liar!" thundered Tom Rain, rushing forward and seizing the ancient villain by the throat: then, as if ashamed of the sudden transport of rage into which he had suffered himself to be betrayed, he withdrew his hand, and said in a more quiet but still determined manner, "Mention not the name of Esther de Medina with disrespect—or I warn you that my vengeance—yes, *my* vengeance—will be terrible! And now prepare to lead me to your place of abode—for I am wearied of this long parley."

He again drew forth one of his pistols, which he had consigned to his pocket when he rushed on the highwayman in the way just described.

"You will repent this, Mr. Rainford," said Old



Death, endeavouring to impress the highwayman with vague and undefined alarms.

"You see how evil your nature is, since you can threaten me thus," cried Tom. "But I care little for your menaces. I have but two alternatives to choose between:—one is to blow your brains out at once—the other is to get you as much into my power as you have got me into yours. Either way will answer my purpose. So now make up your mind which it shall be. The people in Lock's Fields wouldn't take much notice, if they heard a pistol fired; and there's a pretty deep ditch at the bottom of the yard behind the house."

Old Death shuddered; for there was something awfully determined in the highwayman's manner.

"Well—and if I take you to a certain place," he said, "how do I know that you will not split upon me?"

"Trust to me as I shall *then* trust to you," ejaculated Rainford. "Shall we not continue to be necessary to each other? And on my part, I shall at least experience more confidence, since I shall know that you cannot ruin me without bringing destruction on yourself!"

"Be it as you say," growled Old Death: and, fixing his greasy cap upon his head, he prepared to depart.

"One moment—while I say a word up stairs," said Rainford; and, hastily quitting the room, he locked the door behind him.

Scarcely a minute elapsed ere he returned—to the great relief of the old man, who had begun to entertain serious misgivings at being made a prisoner.

"There are marks of dirty boots upon the carpet in the bed-room above," said Tom, confronting Bones, and fixing upon him a searching look. "What were you doing there?"

"I was not there——" began Old Death, quailing beneath that glance.

"Damnable liar!" cried Rainford. "I have half a mind——But, no," he added, checking himself: "time will show what your purpose was, in invading this house; and I shall know how to punish any treachery on your part. And now mark me! You will lead the way—and I shall follow you. Avoid great thoroughfares——"

"Had we not better take a coach?" asked Old Death.

"No—we will walk, be it to the other end of London," replied the highwayman resolutely. "I shall follow close behind you :—beware how you attempt to address yourself to a soul whom you may meet—beware also how you trifle with me. But stay—I will have a guarantee for your good faith. Give me your pocket-book!"

"My pocket-book!" ejaculated Old Death, with something approaching a shudder.

"Yes—your pocket-book," replied Rain. "I know that it contains Bank-notes, and memoranda of value or utility to you; and I will retain it in this house, until we return from the expedition on which we are about to set forth. Come—quick! I have no time for idle delays!"

"My pocket-book!" repeated Old Death, with increasing dismay.

"Do I not speak plain enough?" demanded the highwayman. "If I cannot make myself intelligible by words, I may by deeds: so permit me to help myself to the article I require. It will not be the first time I shall have rifled a pocket," he added, with a merry laugh.

"Do you know that you are treating me in a manner that I never experienced before?" said Old Death, his hideous countenance convulsed with rage.

"I can very well believe what you state," returned Tom Rain coolly. "Hitherto you have had to deal with men whom you got completely into your power—whose lives hung on a thread which you could snap without endangering yourself—who were mere puppets in your hands, and did not dare say their names were their own. Oh! I am well aware how you have played the tyrant—the gripping, avaricious, grinding miser—the cruel, relentless despot! But now,—now, Mr. Bones, you have another sort of person to deal with,—a man who will be even with you anywhere and everywhere,—and who will never let you gain an advantage over him without acquiring one in return."

"Who are you," demanded Old Death, in strange bewilderment, "that talk to me thus?"

"Why—Thomas Rainford, to be sure!" cried the highwayman, laughing—yet with a certain chuckling irony that sounded ominously on the old fence's ears. "And I need not tell you," he continued after a few moments' pause, "that I am rather a desperate character, who would as soon shoot you in the open street—aye, or in the midst of a crowd, too—if you attempted any treachery towards me, as I would case a gentleman of his purse upon the lonely road. But we are wasting time: give me your pocket-book."

Old Death's courage had gradually oozed away during this strange colloquy; and he now mechanically obeyed the command so imperiously addressed to him.

But suddenly recollecting himself, as he was about to hand the pocket-book to the highwayman, he said, "There is one letter here—just one letter—which I should like to keep about my own person."

"Well—take that one letter," returned Tom; "and beware how you endeavour to secrete any thing else."

Old Death's hand trembled as he unfastened the clasp of the greasy old pocket-book; and, when he had opened it, he sighed deeply, as his eyes alighted first on a roll of Bank-notes. Then he turned the

papers over—one after another; and clouds gathered thickly and more thickly upon his countenance.

"This is strange—very strange!" he muttered, as he fumbled about with the letters and memoranda.

"What is strange?" demanded Rainford.

"That I cannot find the letter I want," returned Old Death, with increasing agitation. "Surely I cannot have lost it? And yet—I remember now—I was referring to it this afternoon—and—Oh! yes—I recollect—I put it into my pocket—"

But the search in his pockets was vain: the letter was nowhere to be found.

"Come—there's enough of delay and such-like nonsense," exclaimed the highwayman, snatching the pocket-book from his hand.

Again Rainford quitted the room, locking the door behind him; and in a couple of minutes he returned, saying, "Your pocket-book is safe where no one will meddle with it till we come back. I is now past eleven; let us set off. Come—you go first!"

Old Death led the way, and Tom Rain followed, the latter conveying some pleasant intimation, as he closed the front-door behind him, about an ounce of lead in the other's back, if he showed the slightest sign of treachery.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MYSTERIES OF OLD DEATH'S ESTABLISHMENT.

FROM the back of the Sessions House on Clerkenwell Green, towards Smithfield Market, runs a thoroughfare the upper portion of which is known by the name of Turnmill Street, and the lower part as Cow-Cross Street.

Numerous rag-shops and marine-stores here meet the eye,—establishments where the thief in a small way may obtain a ready sale for the proceeds of his roguery. It is really curious to stand for a few moments and observe the miscellaneous assortment of articles crammed together in the dingy windows of these places,—as if they were receptacles for all the rags that misery could spare, and all the rubbish which domestic neatness throws into the street.

Some of the old clothes-shops in the thoroughfare which we are describing, are strikingly characteristic of the neighbourhood; for you cannot gaze a minute upon the silk handkerchiefs, the bonnets, the shirts, the gowns, the coats, the trousers, and the waistcoats, and other articles hanging outside the windows, or suspended to nails stuck into the walls, without being able to form a pretty accurate computation of the proportion which has been stolen, and that which has been obtained by legitimate purchase.

The women lounging at the doors in Turnmill and Cow-Cross Streets are of dissipated, dirty, and loathsome appearance: nor have the men any advantage over them in these respects.

Take a duchess from the saloons of fashion,—a duchess in her satin or velvet, with her feathers and her diamonds, her refined manners, her elegant demeanour, her polished discourse, and her civilising influence,—and place her by the side of one of those degraded women in Turnmill Street,—a woman with hoarse voice, revolting manners, incrustated with

dirt, clothed in the meanest apparel, if not in absolute rags, and interlarding her conversation with oaths and obscenities,—place those two specimens of the female sex together,—and how astounding is the contrast!

But the duchess has no more claim to praise for the polish—the fascinations—the exquisite refinement which characterise her, than the poor woman of Turnmill Street deserves to be blamed for the degradation and repulsiveness in which she is steeped to the very crown of her head.

Had the two been changed at their birth, she who is now the duchess would have become the dissipated, loathsome, ragged wretch of Turnmill Street; and the babe who has grown to be this ragged wretch, would have sprung up into the splendid lady with the ducal coronet on her brow.

The rich and the high-born do not reflect upon this fact:—they fancy that their very aristocracy is innate as it is hereditary, and that the poor are naturally degraded, vicious, and immoral. Oh! the terrible error—the fearful mistake! For, after all, many a proud peer is in reality the son of his reputed father's groom or footman; and many a dazzling beauty owes her being to her mother's illicit amours with a butler or a page!

The young Prince of Wales, if he live, will doubtless become one of the most polished gentlemen in the universe:—but had he been stolen at his birth, and brought up by poor people, he would even now be running bare-footed in the streets—groping in the gutters for halfpence—gnawing cabbage-stalks and turnip-parings—thieving pudding from cooks'-shops and bacon from cheese-mongers' windows—easing old gentlemen of their handkerchiefs—and familiar with all the horrible vocabulary of the slang language!

No credit, then, to the aristocracy—no blame to the poor! Neither can help being what they are. The influences of the sphere of refinement must have a tendency to refine: the miseries of the poor must produce degradation, immorality, and recklessness.

Ah! my Lord Duke—how ineffable is your contempt for you poor trembling wretch who now stands in the dock at the Old Bailey, before his judge! Your Grace never did a dishonourable action—your Grace has never committed even a crime so genteel as forgery! But has your Grace ever known what starvation is? has your Grace wandered for hours, like a madman, through the streets of a city teeming with all the luxuries of the earth, while a wife and children were weeping for bread in a cheerless garret up some filthy court? No—your Grace has never been placed in such a position; or, believe me, you would probably have purloined a loaf of bread or filched a handkerchief or a purse—even as did that poor trembling wretch in the dock, whose guilt has filled your Grace with so much disgust!

And you, too, my Lady Duchess—how closely your Grace wraps that elegant, warm shawl around your form, lest its mere hem should happen to touch the garments of that poor unfortunate girl who is passing just at the moment when your Grace is stepping from the Opera-door into the splendid equipage which is to whirl your Grace to your palace-home! Oh! I well understand the loathing—the disgust which the menaced contact with that wretched creature excites in the bosom of your Grace. But—ah! does she deserve no pity—no

sympathy, as well as such sovereign contempt—such boundless aversion? The entire sex is not outraged by her fall;—and consider, my lady, Duchess—had you been a poor man's daughter and so hemmed in by miseries of all kinds from your very birth until the age of womanhood, that emancipation from such incessant privations were a very paradise, even though purchased by a crime,—thinkest thou, my lady, that thy virtue would have been stronger than that of the poor wretch who seems to insult you by even breathing the same air that surrounds your aristocracy?

Merciful heavens! how unjust the upper classes are to the lower! The great lord and the haughty lady blame where they should pity—turn away with loathing where they should commiserate—proclaim as innate wickedness that social aspect which is the inevitable result of poverty and oppression—denounce as inveterately depraved those unhappy beings who never were taught nor had a chance to be good!

The infamy of the upper class towards the lower in this country, is immense. A landowner gives his labourer eight shillings a-week, and says, "Go and live comfortably—be neat and clean—attend divine worship on the Sabbath—educate your children—let them read good books—keep them tidy in their appearance—and avoid debt!" Then when this landowner finds the family naked and starving—the man frequenting the public-house in despair instead of the church in holy gratitude—the wife a slattern and a gin-drinker—the children incipient prostitutes and thieves,—when he sees all this, he raises his hands, exclaiming, "Oh! the inveterate, innate wickedness of the working classes!"

The aristocracy and the landowners of this country are, as a whole, the most cruel and heartless set of legalised robbers that ever preyed upon the vitals of suffering millions:—they are now what the French aristocrats and landlords were previously to the Revolution of 1796;—and solemnly—solemnly do we declare our belief that the despotic—tyrannical—remorseless oligarchy which usurps the right of domination, is hurrying the United Kingdom to a similar catastrophe!

But to continue our narrative!

The mist-like rain was still falling, and midnight had struck some time, when Old Death, closely followed by Tom Rain, merged from Cow-Cross Street, and stopped at the entrance to a narrow court in Turnmill Street.

Casting a glance around, to assure himself that Rainford was at his heels, Old Death plunged into the court; and Tom, fancying that the ancient fence meant to elude him, sprang after him and caught him by the skirt of his grey coat.

"No noise," whispered Bones. "Here we are."

Thus speaking, he opened a side-door in the court with a key which he took from his pocket, and, hurrying Tom Rain with him, closed the door carefully again behind them.

The place into which the highwayman was introduced, was as dark as pitch; and, not choosing to be led into an ambuscade, Rainford said, "One moment, my worthy friend! If you have no means of obtaining a light, I will very soon get those means from some public-house—"

While he was yet speaking Old Death procured a light from a tinder-box; and a candle, which stood ready on a low shelf near the door, soon dis-

fused sufficient lustre around to enable the highwayman to observe what kind of place he had been introduced into. It was a small, dingy-looking room, without a vestige of furniture in it, and having the entrance to a narrow staircase on one side, and a second door, facing that by which he and Old Death had entered, on the other.

When a thief arrived at this place with any stolen property, he pulled a wire, the handle of which hung against the wall in the court: a bell rang within—the outer door opened by unseen means, and the thief closed it behind him on entering the little room. He then tapped at the inner or second door which we have noticed, and which had a hatch in it that immediately drew up: no one appeared—but the thief threw in his bundle or parcel. The hatch then closed. In a few moments—or according to the time required for the inspection of the goods—the hatch was raised again, but merely high enough to admit the passage of a small piece of paper, whereon was marked the highest price that would be given for the articles offered for sale. If the paper were immediately returned by the thief, the money was thrust forth; the door in the court opened again by invisible means, the thief departed, and the door was closed behind him: if, however, he did not return the paper, it was considered that he would not accept the amount proffered, and the bundle was restored to him through the hatch.

"Thus, you perceive," said Old Death, whom Rainford compelled to reveal the mysterious use of the hatch in the inner door, "no one is seen by those who come here to dispose of their property."

"And who manages this business for you?" demanded the highwayman; "for it is clear that you cannot be here—there—and everywhere at one and the same time."

"I have a faithful and trustworthy man who has been in my service for many—many years," answered Old Death.

"But the people who have dealings at this place must know that it is your establishment?" said Rainford.

"Quite the contrary!" exclaimed Bones, with a grim smile. "This fencing-crib is called *Tidmarsh's*—and none of the flash men in London know that I have the least connexion with it. It takes its name from my managing man. When I have business to do that I must transact in person, I meet my friends at public-houses and patter-cribs—and my very intimate ones, such as you, at Bunce's. But come up stairs."

Old Death led the way to an indifferently furnished room, where a man, as well stricken in years and as repulsively ugly as himself, though apparently not near so tall, was in bed.

"It's only me, Tidmarsh," said Old Death.

"Only you!" growled the man, sitting up in bed, and staring suspiciously at Rainford.

"Me and a friend—a very particular friend, Tiddy," added Bones. "Indeed, it's Mr. Rainford."

"Oh! that's different!" said Tidmarsh, in a more conciliatory tone. "Your fame, sir, has reached me even in this crib. Take some rum, sir."

And he pointed to a bottle and glasses standing on a table.

"Well—I don't mind if I do—just to keep out the damp, and drink your health, Mr. Tidmarsh,"

cried Rainford in his usual merry, off-handed strain; and, suiting the action to his words, he took a small dram.

Old Death followed his example; and Mr. Tidmarsh suffered himself to be prevailed upon to imbibe a like quantum.

"Now, go to sleep, Tiddy," said Bones, in a patronising manner. "We shan't disturb you any more."

Mr. Tidmarsh gave a species of grunt, by way of assent to the recommendation offered, and threw himself back upon his pillow.

Old Death conducted Rainford into the adjoining rooms on the same storey, and then to the upper chambers; but they were all quite empty. Their walls were black with dirt—the ceilings seemed as if they had originally been painted of a sombre hue—the window-panes were so grimed that it was evident they could admit but a feeble light even in the broad-day—the floors sent up clouds of dust as the feet trod upon them—and dense masses of cobwebs actually rounded off all the corners. There was, moreover, an earthy, infected smell in those rooms, which would have made a weak stomach heave with nausea.

Tom Rain was quite surprised to find all the chambers empty. He had expected to be introduced into warehouses teeming with the produce of three-parts of all the rogerie committed in the great metropolis: but not even so much as an old rag met his eyes. Indeed, the rooms appeared as if they had not been tenanted, or even scarcely entered, for many—many years.

"This may be your reception-house," he said, in a jocular manner: "but it certainly does not contain your stores."

"All the goods are sent away as soon as they are received," replied Old Death.

"And where are they sent to?" demanded Rain.

"To the small dealers—and some to the continent," answered Bones, eyeing him askance.

"Well and good," observed the highwayman coolly. "But you have not a hundred errand-boys, to distribute the bundles and parcels about neither are there vessels sailing for Holland and France every hour in the day."

"What—what do you mean, Tom?" asked Old Death.

"I mean that you are trying to deceive me," exclaimed the highwayman, sternly. "But, look you! we are alone in this house—for I consider your old man down stairs as nobody; and, by God! if you attempt any of your nonsense with me, I'll felly you with the butt-end of this pistol."

"What would you have me do?" said Old Death, trembling at the determined manner in which his companion spoke.

"I would have you show me where you keep your stores," was the resolute answer. "And now—delay not—or it will be the worse for you."

Old Death still hesitated for a moment; but, seeing that Rainford stamped his foot impatiently and raised his pistol in a menacing manner, he disposed himself to do with a good grace what he could not avoid.

Raising the candle high up, so as to light the way thoroughly, he retraced his steps down the narrow, precipitous, and broken staircase, Tom Rain following close behind.

Having reached the little room on the ground-

floor, and which we have already described as the place where stolen property was purchased. Old Death opened the door containing the hatch, and led Rainford into a small back chamber, having the air of an office. Its furniture consisted of a desk, a high stool, and one of those large, old-fashioned eight-day clocks which used to be seen in the kitchens of genteel houses, and the walnut cases of which were as big as coffins. On the desk were writing materials, and a huge ledger, especially dirty, as if it had been well thumbed by hands not too intimately acquainted with soap.

"This is Tidmarsh's crib, I suppose," said Rainford, inquiringly.

Old Death nodded an affirmative.

The highwayman opened the book, in which the entries of each day's transactions were regularly made. We shall quote a specimen of these accounts, prefacing the extract with the necessary explanation, that the numbers prefixed to some of the memoranda were those which tallied with the names of the thieves, burglars, or prostitutes entered in Old Death's books, as was stated on a previous occasion:—

No. 31. Two belchers, a cream-fancy, a randlesman, and a blue billy; three wedge feeders, a yack, and a dee £1 15s.

A Stranger—looked like a shallow cove. Roll of snow, six snooze cases, three narps, and a blood-red fancy 8s.

A Stranger—looked like a spunk fencer. Green king's-man, water's-man, yellow-fancy, and yellow-man; pair of kicksters, a fan, and a dummie 13s. 6d.

No. 4. A cat, six pair of shaker's crabs, and a cule. 12s.

No. 53. Yack and onions £1 12s. 6d.

A Stranger—looked like a snow dropper. Twelve mill-togs. 6s.

A Stranger—looked like a peterman. Busy-sack, redge-fack, six wedge feeders, and togs in busy-sack. £2 15s.

A Stranger—looked like a mushroom fuker. Lilly benjamin. 3s. 6d.

A Stranger—looked like a crocus. To smash three double finnips. £12 10s. 6d.

A Stranger—looked like a high-fly. Redge fawney. 1s. 6d.

Lunan. To smash a single finnip £2 2s. 6d.*

* The ensuing glossary will explain these otherwise enigmatical entries:—

Belcher—close striped handkerchief.
Cream fancy—any pattern of handkerchief on a white ground.

Randlesman—green handkerchief, with white spots.
Blue billy—blue ground handkerchief, with white spots.

Wedge-feeders—silver spoons.
Yack—watch.

Dee—pocket-book of small size.
Shallow cove—a fellow dressed in a Guernsey jacket, and looking like a sailor.

Roll of snow—piece of Irish linen.
Snooze-cases—pillow-cases.

Narps—calico shirts.
Blood-red fancy—handkerchief all-red.

Spunk-fencer—match-seller.
Green King's-man—handkerchief of any pattern on a green ground.

Watersman—sky-coloured handkerchief.
Yellow-fancy—yellow handkerchief, with white spots.

Yellow-man—handkerchief all yellow.
Kicksters—trousers.

Fan—waistcoat
Dummie—pocket-book of large size.

Cat—muff.
Shaker's crabs—ladies' shoes.

Cule—reticule.
Yack and onions—watch and seals.

Snow-dropper—one who steals linen from hedges or drying-grounds.

Mill togs—linen shirts

"Quite a secret police-book, this," observed Tom Rain, after he had gained an insight into its contents.

Old Death smiled grimly.

"But do you mean to say," continued Rainford, "that these persons who are noted by means of numbers—for I can understand the meaning of all that—do not know that this is your crib?"

"Not they!" replied Bones. "I tell you that they call it *Tidmarsh's*, and I may add that not one out of one hundred who come here, even know old Tidmarsh by sight."

"And how does he recognise these fellows who are denoted by the numbers?" asked Tom Rain.

Old Death pointed to a small hole, not larger than a pea, in the wood-work which separated the two rooms; and this hole was covered with a little moveable piece of wood on the inner side—that is, in the office where Tidmarsh was accustomed to sit.

"Things begin to grow a little plainer," said Rainford. "And now, my worthy old fence, to the store-rooms, and to your own special residence."

This command was significantly backed by the motion of Rainford's right hand towards the pocket where he had deposited the pistol with which he had ere now menaced his companion.

Mr. Benjamin Bones swallowed a profound sigh—for it went to his heart to think that he was compelled to yield to the coercion of one whom he had marked out for a slave, but who had become a master.

But as he took up the candle from the desk whereon he had placed it, to enable the highwayman to examine his memorandum-book, a gleam of horrible satisfaction shot athwart his countenance—as if some idea of a consolatory nature had suddenly struck him.

Tom Rain whistled a tune with an air of the most perfect indifference: but that abrupt change in Old Death's features—that scintillation of delight, momentary as its expression was, had not escaped the notice of the highwayman.

The ancient fence now approached the clock, which was ticking in a gloomy, monotonous manner; and, as he laid his hand upon the key which opened the door of the case, he turned sharply towards Rainford, saying, "You persist in going farther to-night?"

"Yes—such is my determination," answered Tom.

Old Death opened the clock, and touched some secret spring inside. This was immediately followed by the noise of wheels, accompanied by a peculiar sound, as of a windlass turning rapidly; and in a few moments, Rainford perceived that the entire clock itself was moving slowly along the wall, revealing by degrees an aperture in the floor.

Peterman—a robber who cuts trunks from the back of carriages.

Busy-sack—carpet bag.

Redge yack—gold watch.

Togs—clothes.

Mushroom fuker—a man who goes about ostensibly to buy old umbrellas, but really to steal.

Lilly benjamin—white upper coat.

Crocus—an itinerant quack doctor.

Smash—change.

Double finnips—ten-pound notes.

Highfly—genteel begging-letter impostor.

Redge fawney—gold ring.

Lunan—common woman.

Single finnip—five-pound note.

In about a minute the working of the machinery ceased—the clock-case was once more stationary—and in the place where it first stood was an opening cut in the boards, large enough to admit the passage of even a moderately stout man.

"Shall I go first?" asked Old Death, with a sardonic smile, which seemed to indicate his opinion that Rainford would not venture to follow him.

But if such were really his idea, he was disappointed; for the highwayman said in the coolest manner possible, "By all means, old chap. And make haste about it—for the night is passing away, and as yet I have seen scarcely anything."

Old Death made no answer, but began to descend an iron ladder, to which the aperture led; and as he gradually went down the steps, he held up the candle in one hand, and with the other supported himself by means of a rope hung for the purpose.

Tom Rain unhesitatingly followed him; and when he reached the bottom of the ladder, he found himself in a long, narrow, vaulted passage, apparently stretching far underground, but to the end of which it was impossible for the eye to penetrate, so feeble and flickering was the light afforded by the candle.

"Wait an instant while I close the entrance," said Old Death: "it is a precaution I never neglect."

"Quite right," observed Tom coolly; and while he affected to be leisurely whistling a tune, he was in reality keeping a most careful watch upon his companion's movements.

Old Death pulled a thick wire which hung down from the top of the vault, and the mechanism of the clock was again set in motion, until the clock-case itself had resumed its usual station over the entrance to the vaulted subterranean.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STORE-ROOMS.

THE reader has already seen and heard enough to be fully aware that Thomas Rainford was a man of undaunted courage: nor did he now tremble when he found himself immured, as it were, in that subterranean, along with a character so full of cunning and malignity as Old Death.

Although completely ignorant of the dark and gloomy locality to which he had been brought, and well aware that his companion was quite capable of the foulest treachery, the highwayman followed the old fence with so firm a step, and whistled away in a manner indicative of such utter recklessness of danger, that his guide was himself astonished at so much daring.

But Rainford was keenly observant of all the movements of his companion; and, resolutely as he walked, he was nevertheless careful in following as precisely as possible in the steps of Old Death, so that he might not be entrapped by any pitfall in that gloomy place.

On his part, Old Death proceeded at a somewhat rapid pace, shading the light with his hand so as to protect it from the strong current of air which rushed through the passage.

This passage, or long subterranean vault, was about ten feet wide and six high. It was walled and arched with rough stone, and paved with huge

flags. The masonry at the sides and over-head was green with the damp; and, even by the fitful light of the candle, Rainford could perceive that this strange place must have been in existence for many—many years.

Here and there he observed little niches in the wall; and in one there was the remnant of an image of the Saviour on the cross. It instantly flashed to the mind of the highwayman that this sinister-looking subterranean had once been connected with some monastic establishment; and his imagination suggested that he was probably treading on the very place where the victims of ancient Popish tyranny had been confined and left to perish through famine.

Old Death and Tom Rain had proceeded about sixty yards, as well as the latter could guess, along the vaulted passage, when the former suddenly stopped, and the highwayman perceived that their farther progress was barred by a huge door, studded with lion knobs.

"You are now about to enter my sanctuary—as I may call it," said Old Death, turning abruptly round on Rainford; "and again I ask you what guarantee I have that you will not betray me?"

"The same security which I have that you will not prove treacherous to me," answered Tom.

Old Death hesitated for a few moments, as if he were about to make another observation: but, yielding to a second thought, which most probably showed him the inutility of farther remonstrance, he proceeded to unbar the massive door.

It opened inwards, and led to a spiral flight of stone steps, up which the two men mounted, Rainford having previously secured the door, which had huge bolts on each side.

Having ascended some forty steps, Old Death, who went first, placed the candle in a niche, and pushed up a trap-door, which immediately admitted a strong current of air: but the precaution observed in respect to the light, prevented it from being extinguished.

"I ought to have brought a lantern with me, by rights," murmured Old Death. "But come along."

"You go on first," said Rainford; "and I'll take care of the candle."

"No—give it to me," replied Bones hastily; and he extended his hand to grasp it.

But Rainford hit him a hard blow on the wrist with the butt-end of his pistol, and then seized the candle.

"What did you do that for?" demanded Old Death savagely.

"Because I suspect you of treachery," returned the highwayman, in a severe tone. "But, remember—I am well armed—and, at the least appearance of evil intent on your part, I fire!"

"You are wrong, Tom—my dear fellow," said Old Death, coaxingly, as he still lingered at the top of the steps.

"Well—I may be; and I shall be glad to find that I am," exclaimed Tom: "and now lead on."

Old Death ascended the few remaining steps; and Rainford followed with his pistol in one hand and the candle in the other.

They were now in a small room furnished as a bed-chamber; and when Old Death had let down the trap-door again, he unrolled and spread a small carpet over it.

"This is your residence?" said Rainford inquiringly.

The old man nodded a grim assent.

"And your store-rooms are in this house?—for I can perfectly well understand that we *have come into another house*—and, by the direction of the subterranean, I should say it must be in Red Lion Street."

"You know London well," said Old Death.

"I do," replied Rainford.

"Although you lived so long in the country," added Bones.

"Right again, old fellow!" exclaimed Tom.

"And now for a farther insight into the mysteries of your abode."

With these words the highwayman approached a door on one side of the room; but Old Death, hastily advancing towards another door, said, "This way, Tom—this way: there is nothing in that quarter—worth seeing."

But the ancient fence seemed agitated; and this was not lost upon his companion.

"Well, as you choose," observed the latter, resuming his careless, off-hand manner. "Lead on."

Bones had already opened the door; and he now conducted the highwayman into a spacious apartment, surrounded by shelves, whereon were ranged an assortment of articles of the most miscellaneous description.

Clothes and china-ware—candlesticks, plated and silver, all carefully wrapped up in paper—piles of silk pocket-handkerchiefs, and heaps of linen garments—carpet-bags and portmanteaus—every species of haberdashery—silk dresses and cotton gowns—velvet pelisses and shawls of all gradations of value—muffs, tuppets, and boas—ladies' shoes and gentlemen's boots—looking-glasses and candelabra—lamps and pictures—tea-urns and costly vases—meerschauum-pipes and dressing-cases—immense quantities of cutlery—piles of printing paper—saddles and bridles,—in short, an infinite variety of articles, to detail which would occupy whole pages.

"Your magazine is crowded, old fellow," said Rainford, who, even while surveying the curious place in which he found himself, did not the less keep a strict watch upon his companion.

"Are you satisfied now?" demanded Old Death.

"Not quite," answered Rainford. "You must have another room where you keep your jewellery and all those kinds of things?"

"What kind of things?" asked Bones sharply.

"Oh! things that require to be packed away with caution, to be sure," replied Tom Rain.

For an instant the old man cast upon him a glance of searching inquiry, as if to penetrate into the most secret profundities of his soul; but the highwayman affected to be very intent in his contemplation of a picture, and the countenance of the fence grew more composed.

"Well," said Rainford, after a few moments' pause, "there's no use in delaying the matter. I *must* and *will* make myself acquainted with every nook of this place."

Old Death moved towards a door facing the one by which they entered the apartment; and Rainford was conducted into a smaller room, but fitted up with shelves like the first.

On those shelves were several boxes, of various dimensions, and numerous jewel-cases wrapped up in paper.

"Watches and plate, I suppose?" said Rainford, pointing to the boxes.

"Something in that way, Tom," replied Old Death.

"Would you like to see any of them?"

"No, thank 'ee," was the answer. "I am not particularly curious in that respect."

Then, as he appeared to glance casually round the room, his eyes dwelt for an instant upon an iron safe let into the wall.

"Well—have you seen enough?" asked Old Death. "It's getting very late."

"It must be early, you mean," replied the highwayman, with a smile. "But still there is time for the business that I have in hand," he added, his manner suddenly changing to seriousness.

Old Death glanced towards him uneasily. Indeed, for some time the fence had been suspecting that Rainford had an ulterior object in view, independent of the mere wish to become acquainted with his abode; and vague alarms now filled his mind. What could the highwayman mean? Was he other than he seemed? Did he intend to betray him?

All these ideas rushed rapidly through the imagination of the horrible old man; and, though he had formed a plan whereby to avenge himself on *the only individual who had ever yet dared to coerce him*, he trembled lest he should be unable to put it into execution. He knew that Rainford was a man of dauntless bravery, and believed him to be a desperate one; and now he found himself completely in this formidable person's power. Not that Old Death lacked courage himself; and he certainly was not deficient in treachery. But he wanted the strength—the physical strength to maintain a deadly struggle with the highwayman, if it should come to *that*!

Thus was it that for the first time, perhaps, the hardened miscreant trembled for his life.

To throw open the window and call for assistance, in case of danger, was to invite the entrance of persons who would discover all the mysteries of his abode; and death were an alternative scarcely more frightful!

"Yes—there is time enough for the business that I have on hand!" repeated Rainford, his countenance assuming so stern—so determined an expression, that Old Death trembled with a colder shudder than before.

"What do you mean?—what is that—that—" stammered Old Death.

"Sit down—there—on that seat!" thundered the highwayman, pointing imperiously to a chair.

"Sit down, I say—or, by heaven! this pistol—"

"Well—I will—I will, Tom," said Bones, perceiving the deadly weapon levelled point-blank at his heart: and he sank into the chair accordingly.

"But do tell me—if I have offended you—if—"

"Hold your tongue!" ejaculated Rainford, in so authoritative a manner that the ancient villain's powers of utterance were suddenly paralysed. "And now mark me," continued the highwayman: "I have a certain task to perform, which nothing save a superior physical strength on your part can prevent. But, in the first place it is necessary that I should bind you—that I should render you incapable of molesting me."

Old Death was unable to reply: but he stared with vacant terror on the individual whose proceedings were alike so mysterious and so alarming.

Rainford took a coil of rope from a bale of goods that stood upon the table, and with extraordinary rapidity proceeded to fasten Old Death's arms and legs to the chair, uttering terrible menaces the whole time that this operation lasted; while the appalling state of the aged fence's mind was indicated only by low moans and convulsive movements of uneasiness.

Having made fast the end of the rope to the iron bars of the fire-place, in such a manner that Old Death could not shift the chair beyond the length of the tether thus formed, Rainford leant himself against the table, and proceeded to address his prisoner

CHAPTER XXXI.

ANOTHER DEED OF INFAMY BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

The scene was not a striking one.

In that small chamber—the shutters of which were securely closed,—by the light of a dimly-burning candle, two men of criminal avocations but of entirely discrepant characters, were seated opposite to each other,—one fastened, pinioned to a large arm-chair—the other placed in a determined attitude against the heavy oaken table.

Fear and vague alarms rendered the always repulsive countenance of Old Death now truly hideous; while excitement and a certain air of bold triumph invested the features of the highwayman with an expression which made him appear perfectly, though sternly handsome.

The gleaming eyes of Old Death flickered in sparkles beneath his shaggy, over-hanging brows—for fierce, ferocious malignity mingled with the terrors that oppressed him;—while Rainford surveyed him with combined abhorrence and contempt.

"Thirty years and ten months have elapsed," said the highwayman sternly, "since one Benjamin Bones sold his half-sister Octavia to a nobleman, who purchased the prize of her virtue for gold!"

For a few moments a dead silence ensued, after these words had fallen from the lips of Rainford: but, when that interval was passed, a wild—a savage—a hyena-like howl, expressive of mingled rage and astonishment, burst from the lips of Old Death.

"Silence, miscreant!" exclaimed the highwayman, in a tone and with a manner of terrible earnestness. "Ah! I have doubtless surprised you by this announcement—this denunciation of a secret that you little deemed to be known to me!"

"My God! who are you?—how came you to learn that secret?" demanded the old fence, writhing in the agony of suspense and wild excitement.

"I will tell you who I am presently," was the answer: "and you will also see wherefore I have compelled you to conduct me hither this night."

"Then you *had* another motive, besides the mere wish to become acquainted with my abode?" said Old Death, perceiving that he had been over-reached in this respect—as indeed he had, for the last half-hour, suspected.

"Fool!" ejaculated Rainford, contemptuously: "of what use was it to me to know where you lived, or to visit your secret repositories of plunder, unless I had some essentially important motive? The fact of your having discovered my abode gave me, in truth, but little uneasiness—for I could have moved

elsewhere in a few hours. That fact, however, furnished me with an apparent excuse to force you to conduct me to *your* den; for I knew that were I to acquaint you with my real object in coming here, you would have risked every thing to prevent it!"

"Again, I say, who *are* you?" demanded Old Death, a kind of superstitious awe now taking possession of him.

"Listen to me," said Rainford. "Nearly thirty-one years have elapsed since you sold your half-sister, Octavia Manners, for the gold which laid the foundation of the immense fortune you have amassed. Yes—this atrocious deed was perpetrated; and one of England's proudest peers was the purchaser of that young creature's virtue—for she was but sixteen, old man, when her ruin was effected through your vile agency! She was sold to the embrace of a man old enough to be her father—aye, even her grandfather;—and the affection which she entertained for a deserving youth in her own sphere of life, was blighted—crushed! She died of a broken heart—leaving behind her a male child whom *you* swore to protect!"

Old Death seemed to recoil from this avowal as from a hideous spectre suddenly starting up before him; for, in spite of his confirmed wickedness, the present topic had awakened painful reminiscences and compunctious feelings within him.

"Yes," continued Rainford, fixing his eyes reproachfully upon the old fence; "she forgave you on her death-bed—forgave you the wrong that you did her,—forgave you, because you promised to make amends for your conduct towards her, by your behaviour to the babe whom she left to your charge."

"And who can say that I did not fulfil my promise?" demanded Old Death, trembling in suspense at what might be the nature of the reply which Rainford would give.

"Who can say that you did not fulfil your promise?" repeated the highwayman, in a slow—deliberate—bitter tone, while his eyes appeared to send daggers to the heart of the old man bound helplessly in the chair. "There is damning evidence against you in that respect!"

"Where—how?" ejaculated Old Death.

"You shall soon learn," replied Rainford. "The nobleman who had purchased your half-sister, provided liberally for the support of her child—their child—and gave a large sum, to be used for the offspring of that sad connexion. But you—"

"I—I did my duty—towards the child," stammered Old Death, "till—it died—"

"Liar!" thundered Rainford, advancing in an appallingly menacing manner towards the helpless captive wretch. "You sold the child to a tribe of gipsies—"

"Mercy! mercy!" groaned Old Death. "Do not kill me, Tom—do not hurt me! I am in your power—spare me!"

Rainford had raised his pistol, as if to dash the butt-end against the forehead of the old man; but mastering his passion, he consigned the weapon to his pocket—for he was afraid to trust his hand with it, while his excitement was so terrible.

"Mercy, indeed!" exclaimed Rainford, in a tone of bitter hatred, not unmingled with contempt: "what mercy did you show towards that hapless child? When Octavia Manners was on her death-bed, that nobleman to whom you sold her virtue, visited her—implored her forgiveness—and placed



in your hands a thousand guineas to ensure a provision for the boy."

"My God!" ejaculated Old Death, a terrible suspicion now flashing like lightning to his mind: "how can you know all this?—even if—you, yourself—"

"Yes—I am the son of that nobleman and your half-sister Octavia!" cried Rainford, placing himself in front of Old Death, on whom he gazed with eyes flashing fire from beneath sternly contracted brows.

"Spare me—spare me!" murmured the wretched man, hanging down his head—for the glances of his injured nephew seemed to scorch and sear his very heart's core.

"Look up—look up!" thundered the highwayman; "and meet the gaze of him whom, when a child, you sold to gipsies—sold, that you might grasp all the gold which was supplied to you for my benefit! Yes—you sold me to strangers—even making a profit of me by the very way in which you rid yourself of my presence in your dwelling! Had it not been for your treachery—your vile avarice in this respect, I might have grown up to be an honest

man. But, no—no," added Rainford bitterly—and a tear trembled on his eye-lash,—“had you kept me with you, I should have been worse—aye, a myriad, myriad times worse than I even now am!"

At the imperious command of the highwayman, Old Death had raised his head; and Rainford then beheld a countenance so fearfully distorted with varied emotions, that he felt he was already partially avenged in having been able to produce such a powerful effect on that aged—that inveterate sinner.

"What do you mean to do to me, Tom?" asked the hideous old fence, now more than ever trembling for his life.

"Not to harm your person," replied the highwayman scornfully: especially," he added, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "as you and I can boast of kinship. But I am wearied of the life I am leading—and my aim is to settle in some foreign clime, where the evil reputation of my deeds in this may not follow me. There are times when I abhor myself—happy, reckless, and indifferent as I usually seem;—for my career has been marked with many a deed at which I blush—all robber, plunderer that I am! And

this discourse, which has turned upon the foul crime perpetrated against the honour and happiness of my mother—Oh! it has reminded me of *one* act in my life that presses sorely—God knows how heavily upon my conscience!”

Rainford walked thrice up and down the room, apparently oblivious of the presence of Old Death, who had never before seen him exhibit so much painful emotion.

“But regrets are useless—save as they prepare our minds for a better course of life,” exclaimed Rainford, abruptly starting from his reverie: then, again confronting Old Death, he said, “And now comes the moment of punishment for all your misdeeds towards me!”

The fence groaned audibly.

“Fear not for your life,” continued the highwayman: “I am no murderer:—my hands were never stained with blood—neither shall they be now! But, in regarding that which is my own—and with interest—aye, compound interest, too—I shall teach a heartless, grasping wretch a lesson that may render him more cautious in future how he sacrifices every human tie at the shrine of avarice! For even amongst such as you—such as I—such as the vilest wretches whose villany has helped to fill these stores,—the claims of kinship—the bonds of relationship have a recognition and a name. Many and many a man who is noted for his misdeeds—or who has even shed the blood of a fellow-creature—would respect the vow which he pledged to rear his dead sister’s child. But you—you ruthlessly thrust away the helpless infant,—you cast off the offspring of that connexion which your own fearful thirst for gold had brought about! Now, then, shall I punish you through the medium of that passion which prompted you to sell my mother to the nobleman, and myself to the gipsy!”

With these words Rainford advanced close up to his prisoner, and said in a short, commanding manner, “The key of that safe—where is it?”

“The key?” repeated Old Death, his countenance becoming ghastly white.

“Yes—the key!” cried the highwayman; and he thrust his hands into the pockets of his captive’s grey coat.

“No—no: you shall not have my gold!” howled the fence, agitating convulsively on his chair.

“Keep quiet!” thundered Rain; “or I shall do you a mischief yet! Keep quiet, I say.—Ah! here is the key! And now roll about, and rave, and foam as you will—I care not!”

“Villain! what are you doing?” exclaimed Old Death, his eyes glaring with ferocious hate—with infernal spite—with blood-thirsty malignity,—glaring, indeed, like those of a famished tiger caught in the snare of the hunter, and beholding a stately deer at a little distance: “what are you doing? You are going to rob me—to plunder me—after all I have done for you—all the good things I have put in your way! But I will be revenged yet—I will send you to the scaffold—I will wreak a terrific vengeance on your head. Keep off, I say—touch not that safe! Damnation light upon you!—perdition seize you! Oh! Tom—dear Tom—don’t rob me—don’t! You’ll drive me to despair—I shall die of grief—and you will be my murderer! Tom—do listen to me! Ah! he opens the safe—the wretch—the villain!”

Thus did Old Death menace and pray—coax and

moan by turns; but at last his voice swelled into a howl of fiend-like rage, which rose like the wailing of a damned soul upon the silence of that early morning-hour.

But Rainford seemed indifferent alike to his earnest beseechings and his paroxysms of fury.

That last, ferocious outburst of rage had completely exhausted the old man; and gasping as if under the influence of strangulation, he fell back in the seat to which he was fastened by the strong cords. But his convulsive motions—his hollow, flashing eyes—his parched lips—and the quivering of his hands, denoted how acutely—how keenly he felt the work of depredation that was in progress.

For Rainford had opened the safe, and was now busily engaged in examining the various drawers, and also sundry pocket-books which he found therein. The former contained hoards of gold coins, and the latter were filled with Bank-notes, making an aggregate of immense value.

The highwayman secured about his person a sum of five thousand pounds, murmuring to himself, “This is sufficient to enable me to become an honest man: I will not leave the old villain penniless.”

He then searched the safe for any private papers that might be deposited there; and in a drawer which he had well-nigh overlooked, he found a small leather case containing a roll of letters, tied round with a piece of riband so faded that it was impossible to determine what its colour might have originally been. A single glance at these documents awakened such emotions of mingled pleasure and pain within his breast, that he determined to possess himself of them; and replacing them in the leather case, he secured them about his person with even more care than he had bestowed on the Bank-notes.

Having thus rifled the safe of as much as he chose to take away, he closed the iron door, locked it, and placing the key on the table, said to Old Death, “I am now about to take my departure from this house. Is there any one living here besides yourself?”

The fence only stared at him in a fierce and sombre manner; for the brain of the old man had become a chaos of wild and terrible thoughts at the contemplation of the daring robbery which was thus practised on *him*—the patron of robbers!

Indeed, the incidents of this eventful night were sufficient to level the powers of a mind stronger even than that of Old Death;—for those incidents had followed each other in such rapid, whirlwind-like succession, and were all so hostile to his interests, that he felt as if he were the victim of a hideous nightmare composed of all the most frightful images that the terrors of a guilty conscience can possibly conjure up during the long dark nights of winter.

The failure of his expedition to Lock’s Fields—the exposure of his treachery to Tom Rain—the discomfiture he had undergone in the presence of Toby Bunce and the lad Jacob—the coercion exercised to force him to discover the secrets of his receiving-house and the mysteries of his store-rooms and dwelling-house—the discovery of his deeply injured nephew in the highwayman, and the revival of the history of his villany in reference to one long since dead,—and, lastly, the robbery of his money and papers,—all these events, occurring with such consecutive rapidity that they appeared to

form but one single dreadful blow, were sufficient to paralyse the energies of the old villain.

"Is there any one living in *this* house besides yourself?" repeated Rainford. "It is for your own good that I ask; for I shall leave you bound in this chair—but, if you are really alone here, I will hasten to drop your friend Tidmarsh a hint, that he may come presently and release you, by which arrangement I shall get as long a start of you as I require."

"There is no one here but myself," at length replied Old Death, aroused from his torpor by the words thus addressed to him.

"Then good bye," said Tom; and, taking up the candle, he quitted the room, heedless of the prisoner's intercession to be released from his captivity.

On gaining the bed-chamber situate above the spiral staircase leading to the subterranean passage, the highwayman remembered two circumstances which made him pause ere he raised the trap-door.

In the first place he recalled to mind the anxiety of Old Death to prevent him from securing the candle at the moment when they were about to emerge from the secret avenue; and it struck Rainford that the old man had intended to have extinguished the light as if by accident—but whether for motives of treachery, or merely to avoid the discovery of something that the fence wished to be concealed, Tom was at a loss to conjecture.

Secondly, Rainford remembered that Old Death had manifested considerable uneasiness when he had approached the first of the two doors opening from that bed-chamber; and he now thought it probable that the fence had been desirous of extinguishing the light in order to prevent Rainford from observing that there were two doors in that room.

"At all events," said Tom to himself, "let us see where this other door leads to."

It was unlocked—as he had expected to find it; because, had it been otherwise, Old Death would not have manifested so much anxiety when he had approached it on their entrance into the bed-chamber.

Proceeding with caution—so as not to incur the risk of having his light extinguished, and equally to avoid any sudden surprise in case the house might really have other occupants besides Old Death—Rainford entered a spacious room which seemed to be fitted up as a chemical laboratory. On a large oaken table were galvanic batteries, and an infinite variety of electrical apparatus as well as the articles on which experiments are usually made with the subtle fluid,—such as pieces of glass, amber, sulphur, wax, silk, cotton, loaf sugar, phials containing a variety of oils, metallic oxides, several common stones, metallic ores, the metals and semi-metals, &c. Leyden jars, batteries, electrophori, electrometers, discharging rods, &c., were also crowded together on the table. In a large earthen pan under the table were the flayed carcasses of several rabbits, frogs, and such vermin as rats and mice, all of which appeared to have been only very recently stripped of their skins—for they emitted no putrid smell, and the blood was still oozing from them.

On a shelf were plaster of Paris casts of upwards of fifty heads of men and monkeys. On the base of some of the heads there were inscriptions in black

letters, stating the originals from which the casts were made; and, with a rapid glance, the highwayman read the principal ones, which were these:—

ARTHUR THISTLEWOOD.
Executed for High Treason, 1820.

DAVID HOGGART.
Executed for Murder, 1821.

GEORGE BARRINGTON.
The Notorious Pickpocket—died 1811.

HENRY FAUNTLEROY.
Executed for Forgery, Nov., 1824.

JOHN THURTELL.
Executed for Murder, 1824.

WILLIAM PROBERT.
Executed for Horse-stealing, 1825.

There were casts from the heads of several other celebrated criminals; but we need enumerate no more.

Intrepid—dauntless—bold as Tom Rain was, he nevertheless experienced a cold shuddering as he surveyed the objects ranged upon that long shelf; for this thought forced itself upon him—"I wonder whether a cast of MY head will ever be there!"

In order to chase these gloomy reflections from his mind, Rainford turned away from the contemplation of the shelf and its sinister contents. A cupboard-door stood partially open in one corner of the room; and he hastened to inspect the recess.

But what pen can depict his horror—what language can describe his astonishment, when upon a shelf within that cupboard he beheld four human heads staring out at him with eyes wide open but perfectly motionless, and on the pupils of which the rays of the candle flashed with extraordinary brilliancy!

For an instant the highwayman felt afraid:—in what description of place was he? what meant that ghastly spectacle?

But, conquering his terrors, of which indeed in another moment he was ashamed, he approached nearer: and the idea struck him that he beheld admirable models in wax. Still the flesh was so closely resembling that of the dead—the appearance of the countenances and of the crown of the heads, which were all closely shaven, was so natural, that he extended his hand and touched the cheek of one of those appalling objects.

Great God! it was indeed human flesh,—icy cold, and producing a sensation which the touch of naught beside can produce!

In spite of himself, Rainford cast a shuddering glance around him: then, once more ashamed of his weakness, he resumed his inspection of the heads.

They were evidently prepared for preservation; for an odour of strong spices emanated from them, and the eyes, fitted into the sockets, were of glass. Hence the strange brilliancy produced by the reflection of the candle.

The highwayman was still absorbed in the contemplation of these frightful objects, when a door at the farther end of the room slowly opened; and a man, enveloped in a loose dressing-gown, and holding a lamp in his hand, appeared on the threshold.

But the instant he beheld Rainford, he uttered

an ejaculation of surprise and alarm—hastily retreated—and barred and bolted the door behind him.

He had, however, been long enough in the room for Rainford to obtain a full view of his countenance; and it was with profound astonishment that the highwayman had recognised Dr. Lascelles!

"What!" he thought; "that respectable physician in league with Old Death?"

And he stood for some moments gazing vacantly at the door by which the doctor had entered and also so abruptly disappeared again.

Then it suddenly struck him that the physician might discover the state of bondage in which Benjamin Bones had been left; and not only would the immediate release of the old fence follow, but an active pursuit be probably instituted by both individuals after himself.

He accordingly determined to beat a retreat as speedily as possible. Not that he was afraid of encountering Old Death and the doctor; but he knew not what principles of danger the establishment possessed, and which might be turned against himself. He had seen quite enough of the house in Turnmill Street and of that where he now was (in Red Lion Street) to be well aware that they were no ordinary places of abode; and he was also sufficiently well acquainted with the character of Old Death to feel conscious that no mercy was to be expected at his hands, should he fall completely into his power.

It is, therefore, no disparagement to the heroism of the highwayman to state that he was now anxious to effect his exit from the strange place wherein he found himself; and it naturally struck him that there must be a more speedy and convenient avenue of egress than the subterranean. He readily comprehended that the underground passage was used as a medium of transferring goods from the house in Turnmill Street to the store-rooms of the establishment in Red Lion Street; and that it might also serve, at a pinch of need, as an avenue of escape for Old Death from his own bed-room.

But that the subterranean was the only means of ingress and egress in respect to the house in Red Lion Street, Tom could not for an instant suppose; as a dwelling without a door, or with a door that was never opened, would soon become an object of suspicion in the neighbourhood.

Judging by the direction of the subterranean passage, the highwayman was enabled to conclude that the room in which he now found himself was at the back of the house, and that the one where he had left Old Death was in the front, as was also that into which Dr. Lascelles had retreated; and he was moreover convinced that these apartments were all on a first or upper storey, but decidedly not on the ground-floor.

Now as the laboratory, Old Death's bed-chamber, and the larger store-room formed the suite at the back of the house, and there was no flight of stairs connecting them with the ground-floor, it was clear to Rainford that the means of communication with that ground-floor must be from the front part of the house; and into the rooms looking on the street he did not choose to penetrate, because he might there encounter the doctor and Old Death. He therefore came to the conclusion that he must escape by the back part of the house, or else dare the subterranean.

All these calculations, which have occupied us some time to record, were made and summed up in a few moments by Tom Rain.

Nor did he now hesitate what course to adopt.

Placing the candle upon the table, he hastened to throw up a window; but, to his annoyance, he found it securely barred:—and his hand assured him that the bars could not be removed by mere physical strength.

He had not time nor implements to attempt to force a way through this difficulty; and the only alternative appeared to be the subterranean.

Resuming possession of the candle, he returned into Old Death's bed-room—drew away the carpet—raised the trap-door—and commenced the descent of the spiral staircase, closing the trap after him and bolting it inside.

But scarcely had he proceeded ten steps downwards, when his foot suddenly slipped; and, in the attempt which he made to recover himself, the light went out.

At the same instant he heard heavy steps treading upon the trap-door overhead, and then the hum of voices—but whose he could not distinguish—in the room which he had just left.

"Now, Tom Rain, look alive, old fellow!" he murmured in self-encouraging apostrophe; and, with a resolute step, he hastened rapidly down the spiral staircase, amidst a darkness so intense that it was all but *felt*!

CHAPTER XXXII.

RAINFORD IN THE SUBTERRANEAN.

TOM RAIN reached the bottom of the stairs in perfect safety; and, as he had carefully noted the geography of the subterranean when he traversed it an hour previously with Old Death, he experienced but little difficulty in threading his path along it, even amidst the black darkness through which he literally seemed to be pushing his way.

In a few minutes his progress was stopped by a wall, which his extended arms encountered; and he now knew that he had reached the extremity communicating with the house in Turnmill Street.

Having succeeded in grasping the wire which, passing through the top of the vault, was connected with the mechanism of the clock overhead, he pulled it vigorously.

But the machinery moved not!

Then, for the first time during this eventful night, the highwayman became appalled at the dangers on which he had entered.

Again he tugged at the wire: it snapped short close by the roof, and the long piece thus broken off, fell at his feet.

"Damnation!" cried Rainford; and he stamped impatiently on the cold, damp stones.

Suddenly it struck him that there might be one wire to move the clock over the opening at the head of the iron ladder, and another wire to move it away from that opening.

He accordingly began to feel with his hands for this second wire the existence of which was suggested by his imagination; but at the end of a minute he was compelled to admit to himself that it did indeed exist only in imagination.

No such second wire was to be found!

He then hastily ascended the ladder, and ended.

voured to hurl the clock from off the opening which it covered: but the huge machine was as solidly fixed there as if it had formed a portion of the vaulted roof itself.

Escape seemed to grow every moment more hopeless; and now came the appalling thought that Old Death and the Doctor would soon have had sufficient time to repair from the house in Red Lion Street to that in Turnmill Street, and thus secure against him the avenue covered by the clock—even if it were not sufficiently secure already!

What was he to do?

Again and again he tried to force away the heavy clock: but there it stood, immovable—and when he paused to reflect, its steady, monotonous ticking fell ominously upon his ears.

At length it struck him that he would retrace his way to the other extremity—force up the trap-door leading to Old Death's bed-chamber—and, with a pistol in each hand, dare every thing.

But what if that trap-door were secured on the other side?

No:—he remembered to have observed that there was not a bolt nor a bar to break the level of its upper surface as it fitted in flush with the floor.

Encouraged by the scintillation of hope that thus gleamed in upon him, Rainford hurried back to the other end of the subterranean—ascended the spiral staircase—grasped his pistols—and listened attentively.

All was still in the room above:—not the murmur of a voice—nor the creaking of a footstep!

He then slowly and carefully drew back the bolt of the trap-door, and tried to raise it.

But it moved not!

He applied additional force, under the impression that some heavy piece of furniture might have been dragged over the trap: but still it was as motionless as the thick, solid, substantial flooring in which it was set.

Rainford returned the pistols to his pockets, so that nothing might impede the application of all his strength to the task on which his liberty depended: but no—the door moved not!

The highwayman bit his under lip almost till the blood started forth—for he felt that his calmness was abandoning him.

Then how bitterly did he repent the course which he had adopted after his interruption in the laboratory by the appearance of Doctor Lascelles. Instead of trusting himself to that hideous subterranean, he should have essayed an escape by means of the front rooms of the house.

Regrets were, however, useless:—he must act—and not waste time in self-reproach!

Yes: he must act—if he would not die in that dreadful place, where the vindictiveness of Old Death would be sure to leave him!

To act!—oh! how easy to think of acting!—But how *was* he to put his thought into execution?

A stone pavement beneath—stone walls on either side—a stone ceiling overhead—at one end an avenue closed by a huge clock—at the other a trap-door evidently secured on the outside,—these were the obstacles—these were the barriers against which he had to contend.

And what were the implements within his power?

His two hands—a clasp-knife—and a pair of pistols!

Quick as lightning the idea flashed across him

that the iron ladder at the other extremity of the subterranean was moveable, and that it would serve him as a battering-ram.

Rejoiced at this thought, he once more retraced his way along the vaulted passage, and eagerly grasped the ladder.

His conjecture was right: it merely hooked on to two iron rings fixed into the masonry just below the aperture covered by the clock; and, heavy though it was, yet Rainford now bore it as easily as if it were of wood—for renewed hope had rendered him strong and bold as a lion.

It was, however, somewhat difficult to drag the iron ladder up the spiral staircase; but in a few minutes this portion of the task was accomplished; and Rainford now prepared to assault the secret entrance to Old Death's dwelling.

Placing himself in such a position that he might deal a vigorous blow upwards with his ponderous engine, and then be able to seize his pistols the instant they might be required, he went to work with a stout arm and a still stouter heart.

Once—twice—thrice—and up swung the ladder:—that single blow was sufficient—and the trap-door burst from its setting.

Quick as thought, Rainford seized his pistols, and thrusting up the trap, ascended the last few steps of the spiral staircase.

Throwing back the carpet which had been replaced over the trap-door, he found, to his infinite surprise, that there was no resistance to his egress from that subterranean where, at one time, it seemed probable that he was destined to find a tomb; and, gazing rapidly around the room, he neither perceived Old Death nor the Doctor—nor indeed a single living soul.

Recovering all his wonted calmness, he proceeded to examine the trap-door, for the purpose of ascertaining how it had been secured against him: and, on a close inspection, he observed a spring-bolt let into the side of the trap-door in such a way that, when the trap was closed, it neither appeared above nor below it. This bolt was either held back within the wood, or made to fly into a hole made to receive it in the beam against which the trap-door closed, by means of two screws that could easily be pressed inward. But the force of Rainford's battering-ram had unsettled this artfully-contrived piece of mechanism.

It was clear that some one had secured the trap-door; because even if the spring-bolt had flown into its socket by accident, still the carpet could not have spread out of its own accord. Moreover, when Rainford had retreated to the subterranean, he had heard footsteps and voices in Old Death's room. It therefore struck him that those who had so secured the trap-door, had departed to protect the avenue of escape in Turnmill Street, in the confidence that the said trap-door was too strong to be forced.

Nevertheless, it was necessary to guard against the possibility of an ambuscade; and Tom held his pistols in a manner calculated to render them instantaneously available.

He determined to proceed by way of the laboratory; but, on trying the door, he found it locked.

Without an instant's hesitation he forced it open with one vigorously applied blow of his foot: but here again he encountered no resistance.

Passing through the laboratory, he tried the door by which he had seen Dr. Lascelles appear and dis-

appear again so abruptly; and this time he was spared the necessity of violent exertion—for the door was not locked.

He now entered a passage leading to a flight of stairs; down which he hastened, and reached a kind of hall, from whence the street-door opened.

But he did not immediately issue forth. He experienced an invincible curiosity to ascertain if Old Death had in reality been released from the state of bondage in which he had left him; and, forgetting the terrible dangers whence he had escaped with so much difficulty, he re-ascended the staircase.

The appearance of this part of the house was dirty and neglected. Indeed, it afforded no evidence that the tenement was inhabited at all; but conveyed quite the contrary impression. The fan-light above the front-door was boarded over; and thus the hall itself was nearly dark, the only light it enjoyed being admitted through the ill-closed joints of the boarding just mentioned. The paper was falling away from the walls of the staircase; and dust and dirt had accumulated wherever the hand touched or the eye could penetrate.

On regaining the landing on the first-floor, Tom Rain tried a door opposite to that by which he had issued from the laboratory; but it was locked. He forced it open, and found himself, as he suspected he should, in the very room where he had left Old Death; for that apartment had two doors.

And, to his ineffable surprise, Old Death was still there,—still sitting in the chair to which he had been fastened with a strong cord;—and that cord had not been removed.

The head of the fence was bent forward, and hung—or rather drooped, upon his breast.

The highwayman was alarmed, and hastened towards him.

But the moment he caught a glimpse of his features, he started back horror-stricken,—and stupified as it were by the hideous spectacle that presented itself to his view.

For the old man's countenance was fearfully distorted, and nearly black—the eyes protruded from their sockets, and seemed staring on vacancy—and the under jaw had fallen.

"Holy God! he is dead!" ejaculated Rainford at length: "and I—I have killed him!"

At that instant the door leading from the inner apartment was slowly and cautiously opened; and the highwayman, yielding to a natural impulse, turned and fled abruptly by the one communicating with the passage, and which he had forced open a few moments previously.

This movement on his part was so sudden and so quickly executed, that he did not perceive the person who was entering the room; but whether that person observed him, or not, he was unaware.

Descending the stairs three or four at a time, the highwayman quitted the house by the front door, and did not breathe freely until he had closed it behind him and found himself at length in the open street.

Dauntless—daring as he was, the idea that he had caused, though unintentionally, the death of the old fence, prostrated for a time the powers of a naturally vigorous mind; and horror threw all his thoughts into chaotic confusion.

He did not even pause a moment to examine, as well as the darkness of the hour would have permitted him, the outward appearance of the house

which he had just left; but hurried away as quickly as he could go from the vicinity of a place where he had seen and undergone so much in such an incredibly short space of time.

For it was about one o'clock when he and Old Death had entered the house in Turnmill Street; and Saint Paul's proclaimed the hour of three as Rainford crossed Smithfield Market.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MRS. MARTHA SLINGSBY.

THE reader who is acquainted with the West End of the great metropolis of the British Empire, cannot have failed to notice the air of gloomy grandeur which characterises the aristocratic mansions of Old Burlington Street.

The dingy brick-fronts—the massive doors, all of a sombre colour—the windows, darkened by heavy hangings—and the dead silence which seems to prevail within, produce upon the passer-by a strange and almost melancholy effect.

There is nothing bustling—nothing cheerful in that street: on the brightest day of summer its aspect is cold—mournful—prison-like.

It seems to be the last refuge of the aristocracy of the old school,—that aristocracy which still clings to all its ancient prejudices, its haughty notions, its exclusive pride,—an aristocracy which finds its influence each day narrowing into a smaller compass, in proportion as that of the masses expands around it.

And God grant that every thing in the shape of hereditary aristocracy may shortly expire altogether—crushed by the weight of new interests and modern civilisation!

In one of those gloomy-looking houses of Old Burlington Street dwelt Mrs. Slingsby—a lady of about forty-two, but who, enhancing by art a natural conservation of beauty truly miraculous in a female of her age, seemed at least five or six years younger.

Her hair was very dark; and as she wore the sweetest French caps that Paisian fashion could suggest, she was invested with that air which bewilders the common observer between its admirable coquettishness and its matronly sedateness.

Her complexion was clear and delicate; and a careful but regular use of cosmetics concealed those incipient wrinkles which appeared at the corners of the eye-lids. Her teeth were perfect, white, and even; and her figure, though upon a large scale, was maintained in fine symmetry by the skill of her dress-maker. She had naturally a splendid bust; and as she usually wore very high dresses, she was the better enabled to maintain its appearance of youthful firmness in spite of the prominent expansion it had experienced as the lady herself increased in years.

Mrs. Martha Slingsby was the aunt of Mr. Clarence Villiers, the lover of Adolais Torrens. When very young, she was sacrificed by her parents to a gentleman double her age, and who had acquired a fortune while he lost his health in India. Shortly after this union, circumstances compelled Mr. Slingsby to return to Calcutta; and his youthful wife accompanied him. There they remained about eight years, at the expiration of which period

Mr. Slingsby died of a broken heart, his immense wealth having been suddenly and entirely swept away by the failure of a great mercantile and banking establishment in the Anglo-Indian capital. Mrs. Slingsby, however, found a friend in the person of Sir Henry Courtenay—a baronet who had long held a high office in the Council of India, and who was about to return to England, having relinquished the cares of employment in the public service. He was upwards of fifty at that period—a widower—but having a family of young children. The moment that the misfortunes of Mrs. Slingsby were reported to him by a mutual friend, Sir Henry proposed to her that she should enter his family to supply, as far as possible, the attentions of the mother whom the children had lost. This offer was gratefully accepted; and Mrs. Slingsby, who had no offspring of her own, returned to England with the baronet.

For some years after her arrival in London, she remained in the family of Sir Henry Courtenay,—where she appeared to be treated as a near relation, and not as a dependant. But when the boys and girls were old enough to be placed at school, she removed to the house in Old Burlington Street, in which we now find her. Rumour declared that she was enabled to take so handsome an establishment, in consequence of the sudden and unexpected recovery of a portion of that fortune which was supposed to have been irretrievably swallowed up in the failure of the bank at Calcutta, and the loss of which had broken her husband's heart. At all events, she paid her way regularly—and was famed for her numerous charities. Calumny had never assailed her; for she was so regular in her religious duties—so retired in her mode of life—so ready to assist the deserving poor—so constant in her donations to all humane and philanthropic institutions—and so zealous a patroness of Missionary and Bible Societies, that her neighbours looked upon her as a very pattern of Christian virtue.

Between herself and the Courtenay family the most sincere attachment appeared to exist. Whenever the young gentlemen and the young ladies returned home for the holidays, they invariably passed a week with her whom they almost looked upon as a mother; and Sir Henry himself, in speaking of her to his friends, seemed to take a delight in eulogising the manner in which she had performed her duty towards his children. The consequence was that his relations and acquaintances echoed these praises elsewhere; and Mrs. Martha Slingsby was quoted at the West End as the perfect model of a good and excellent woman.

Thus, at the age of forty-two, Mrs. Slingsby had escaped that ordeal through which so many beautiful widows are doomed to pass: we mean, the whisperings of calumny. Not a breath had ever sullied her fame;—not a hint had ever been dropped to her disparagement. Scandal seemed to avoid her threshold as an evil spirit is supposed to recoil from the vicinity of the temple of worship.

We must observe that Sir Henry Courtenay was now close upon sixty-three—thirteen years having elapsed since Mrs. Slingsby had entered his family in India. He was nevertheless a fine man, on whose brow time seemed to sit lightly, considering how great a portion of his mortal career was already run. It is true that he wore false teeth and false hair; but art had rendered those substitutes

so natural in appearance, that few suspected they were really false. Elegant in his manners—endowed with a mind which had treasured up the richest stores of intellectual wealth—fascinating in his conversation—and evincing in his attire the taste of a polished gentleman, Sir Henry Courtenay was one of the brightest stars of the fashionable world—a favourite at Court—and welcome in every gay circle.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of that day which followed the events related in the few preceding chapters, that Mrs. Martha Slingsby was seated in her elegantly furnished drawing-room, revising the list of her usual Christmas donations to the humane, philanthropic, and religious Societies.

Adelais and Rosamond Torrens were seated one on each side of her, and aiding their kind friend in her pious task.

Rosamond held in her hand a memorandum-book from which she read the names of the various associations alluded to;—Mrs. Slingsby had a cash-box open before her;—and Adelais made entries, according to this lady's dictation, in another memorandum-book.

The two beautiful girls appeared to be the daughters of the elegant and handsome woman who sat between them; and there was so much sweetness in the countenances of all three—so much animation, and so much modesty—that a painter would have been rejoiced to depict the group as Charity dictating to Benevolence and Mercy.

"Proceed, dear Rosamond," said Mrs. Slingsby, when Adelais had finished a note in her memorandum-book.

"*The Orphan Children's Free-School Association* madam," read the young maiden thus addressed; "and last year you gave ten guineas."

"This Christmas I shall subscribe fifteen, my loves," observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a mild and silvery tone of voice. "There is no duty so sweet—so holy as to contribute to the religious instruction of those poor creatures who are deprived of their natural protectors. Besides, the committee have manifested the most praiseworthy readiness to attend to any suggestions which I may deem it right to offer. For instance, it was the custom until lately to have three multiplication-table lessons to only one Bible-reading; and this, you must admit, my loves, was very indiscreet—I will not use a harsher term. But, in consequence of my recommendation, the dear children have now *three* Bible-readings to *one* multiplication-table lesson. Have you written down *fifteen guineas*, my dear?" she inquired, turning towards Adelais.

A reply was given in the affirmative; and Mrs. Slingsby wrapped the amount up in an elegant sheet of rose-coloured paper, and, having noted in pencil the contents of the little packet, added it to several others which were ranged before her on the table.

Rosamond then read the next item.

"*The Poor Authors' Assistance Fund*; and last year you gave five guineas, madam."

"And this year I shall send two, my loves," said Mrs. Slingsby. "Authors and journalists are ruining the country, both politically and morally, as fast as they can. They are writing for the people, and *against* the aristocracy; and this, my loves, is a crying abomination. Heaven forgive me

for speaking in such harsh terms—so inconsistent with pious meekness and Christian forbearance; but it would disturb the patience of a saint to behold the attacks made by these men upon our blessed Constitution—our holy Church, and its most necessary union with the State—the prerogatives of our monarch—the rights of the upper classes—the privileges of wealth—and all those institutions which were perfected by the wisdom of our ancestors. Do you understand me, my loves?”

“Oh! quite, madam,” answered Adalais, who already began to look upon liberal-minded authors and journalists as a set of incarnate fiends banded against every thing worth preserving in society.

“Besides, my dear girls,” added Mrs. Slingsby, “the *Poor Authors' Assistance Fund* does not publish a Report of its proceedings nor a list of those who subscribe to it; and, under all circumstances, I think that I should be acting more consistently with my duties as a Christian and as an Englishwoman devoted to the blessed institutions of her happy country, to decline any donation whatever to a Society encouraging infidels and republicans. So you may draw a pen through the name, Rosamond, love. There!—now my conscience is at rest. Which is the next item?”

“*The Distressed Milliners' Friends Society*, madam,” was the answer.

“That is another Association from which I must withdraw my patronage,” observed Mrs. Slingsby, her countenance losing its serene placidity in an air of severity. “You are too young and too pure-minded to understand my motives, dear girls; but when I tell you that most of these distressed milliners are very naughty women, you will perceive the justice of my conduct. And then they endeavour to make their penury an excuse for their turpitude! Oh! how wicked—how sinful is human nature, my loves! Erase that name also, dear Rosamond. And now what is the next?”

“*The South-Sea Island Bible-Circulating Society*, madam; and last year you gave thirty guineas.”

“That is indeed a blessed institution!” exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, turning her eyes piously upward; “and it is to this Society's rooms that we are going in the evening to hear that estimable man, Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks, give an account of the mission from which he has just returned. I shall increase my donation by five guineas in this instance.”

Adalais accordingly wrote down thirty-five guineas, which sum was duly wrapped up in rose-coloured paper and added to the other packets.

Rosamond then read the next item in her memorandum-book.

“*The Naked Savages General Clothing Association*; and last year—”

“Pardon me, dearest girl,” said Mrs. Slingsby, “I cannot support that Society any longer. There is in its title a word most offensive to the ears of decency; and I do not know how I could have ever been prevailed upon to lend it the countenance of my name and the aid of my purse. Besides, I do not think the object of the institution is useful; for in India one sees the natives of the lower orders in the country districts, going about in a state bordering on nudity, and one gets so accustomed to it that it produces no disagreeable effect whatever. The name of the Association is decidedly indelicate; but there is nothing repulsive in the fact

of savages going about in a state of nudity. You may strike out the item, Rosamond love.”

“I have done so, madam. The next is, *The—*”

Rosamond was interrupted by a loud knock at the front-door, which resounded through the house.

In a few moments Sir Henry Courtenay was announced.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE PIOUS LADY.

THE baronet entered the room with a smiling countenance and a graceful salutation.

“Pray be seated, ladies,” he exclaimed, addressing himself to Adalais and Rosamond, who had risen from their chairs. “My dear Mrs. Slingsby, I need not inquire concerning your health—for you look quite charming this morning.”

“You know, Sir Henry, that I am not pleased by flattery,” said the lady in a reproachful tone.

“A thousand pardons, my dear madam,” returned the baronet. “But you must remember that we have now been acquainted for some years—that our friendship is not only of yesterday's date—and that if I venture on a little freedom with you, it is as a brother might address himself to a sister for whom he has the highest esteem. Yes, ladies,” he added, turning towards Adalais and Rosamond, “this excellent woman—this almost angel, as I may denominate her—was a mother to my children; and that is a circumstance which I can never forget.”

“You attach more importance than is necessary, Sir Henry, to the mere performance of a duty,” observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a calm and modest manner.

Adalais and Rosamond exchanged glances, which seemed to say, “Admirable woman! we already love her as much as if she were our maternal parent!”

“But I am afraid that I am interrupting an occupation of more value than my idle chit-chat can possibly prove to be?” exclaimed Sir Henry, who surveyed Rosamond with an ill-concealed admiration. “Some useful or pious labour was engaging you, young ladies, no doubt;—for, in the society of Mrs. Slingsby, not a moment is likely to be passed without producing a benefit to at least some section of the great human family.”

“The anniversary of that holy day on which the Saviour of Mankind suffered on the cross, is approaching, Sir Henry,” observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone and manner suiting the solemnity of her remark; “and you know that I am in the habit of forwarding my mite at this season of the year to those humane, religious, or philanthropic institutions which deserve support.”

“I never forget any of those pious duties which you have taken upon yourself, my dear madam,” said the baronet. “And, indeed, the object of my present visit is—But the act of charity of which I am desirous to make you the instrument,” he added, glancing towards the young ladies, “involves details of so painful a nature, that—”

“I understand you, Sir Henry,” interrupted Mrs. Slingsby; “and this consideration for the feelings of those who are not accustomed to look upon the dark side of the world's picture, is worthy of your generous disposition. Adalais, my love—Rosamond, dearest—pray retire for a short period.”



This request was conveyed in a manner so affectionate and with such witching softness, that the maidens to whom it was addressed, could not help embracing their kind friend ere they left the room.

The moment the door had closed behind them, Sir Henry drew his chair close to that of Mrs. Slingsby, and, placing his arm round her waist, imprinted a kiss of burning desire upon her lips.

"Martha, you are really surprisingly beautiful to-day," he whispered in her ear.

"Do you think so, Henry?" she murmured, her eyes lighting up with the excitement of that contiguity. "And yet I have fancied that your behaviour has been somewhat cold towards me of late."

"Do not entertain such a suspicion, my dearest creature!" exclaimed the baronet, plunging his hand into the bosom of this pious lady's dress. "Had either of us a right to complain; I think it would be myself; for—"

"Oh! do not reproach me, Henry!" she murmured, abandoning herself to his lustful toyings. "But ever since the difficulty I experienced in producing that last miscarriage, I have been so frightened lest—"

"Nonsense, Martha! do not alarm yourself without a cause," interrupted the baronet. "Even if it did come to *that*, the matter could be easily arranged. A few weeks' retirement into the country, on some charitable mission—ha! ha!"

"True!" said the frail fair one. "But the chances of detection—oh! I shudder when I think of it! Consider how admirably we have hitherto managed—"

"And how completely the world is deceived in regard to us," added the baronet, laughing. "There is nothing like a religious demeanour to throw dust in people's eyes. Were a syllable of scandal breathed against you, you have the patrons of all those humbugging Societies to defend you. But what are you going to do with yourself this evening? Can you not devote a few hours to me?"

"I wish I could, Henry," returned the lady; "but it is impossible! A dreadful bore named Sheepshanks is going to entertain the devout with his nonsense; and it would seem so odd—so very odd if I were not present."

"It is now upwards of three weeks since we

slept together," said the baronet, in a tone of reproach.

"Yes—but you know that I cannot pretend too often to pass the entire night by the sick-bed of some poor woman," returned Mrs. Slingsby. "And now, dearest Henry, I have a favour to ask of you."

"Name it," said the baronet, in a low murmur—for his passions were furiously excited by his voluptuous toyings with his mistress.

"You must write me a check for a thousand pounds," replied the lady, winding her arms round his neck, and then literally glueing her lips to his.

"Oh! you are becoming very extravagant, Martha," said the baronet. "But I suppose I must yield—"

"You are a dear, generous fellow," murmured the lady, as she suffered herself to be led to the sofa.

* * * * *

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Mrs. Slingsby rang the bell; and a sleek, comfortable-looking footman answered the summons.

The lady was then sitting, in her usual quiet, placid manner, in a chair near the table; and the baronet was placed at a respectful distance from her.

"Bring up luncheon, James," said Mrs. Slingsby. "Sir Henry, you will take a glass of champagne? I know you are somewhat partial to it. But a decanter of water for me, James."

"Yes, madam;"—and the domestic withdrew.

In a short time he returned, bearing a tray, which he placed on the table, and then retired again.

Having paid their respects to the cold viands placed before them, the lady and gentleman did honour to the champagne, both drinking out of the same glass, the servant having only brought up one of the description suited to that particular wine.

When the collation was ended, Mrs. Slingsby drauk a tumbler of water to take away the smell of the champagne from her mouth; but she did not appear to relish the lympid beverage quite so well as the rich juice of Epervay.

The baronet then wrote the lady a cheque on his banker for a thousand pounds; and, having made a certain little appointment with her for a particular evening in the ensuing week, and at a place of rendezvous as convenient as it was safe, he took his departure.

Immediately after Sir Henry had left the abode of Mrs. Slingsby, that lady's housekeeper sought the presence of her mistress, and was forthwith admitted to the private interview which she desired.

"What is it, Magdalen?" inquired Mrs. Slingsby, when the housekeeper stood in her presence.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, to have any thing unpleasant for such ears as yours," was the answer; "but I am convinced that scullion-girl is in the family-way."

"Magdalen!" ejaculated the pious lady, horrified at the mere idea. "Oh! do not utter any thing so uncharitable!"

"I am sure of it, ma'am, I repeat," persisted the housekeeper. "In fact I've had my suspicions about it for a long—long time; and now I'm certain."

"Magdalen," said Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone of profound solemnity, "this is a dreadful occurrence to take place in a house which, I may safely assert,

has never yet been tainted with the breath of scandal—at least so long as I have occupied it. Are you sure that your conjecture is right?"

"I would take my salvation oath that it is, ma'am," responded the housekeeper.

"That expression on your part is incorrect, Magdalen," observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone of mild reproach. "But I of course believe all you tell me relative to that miserable—degraded girl. Let her be sent from the house this minute, Magdalen—this very minute! Pay her any wages that may be due to her, and inform her that her box shall be sent after her to her parents, with a note acquainting them of the reason for her abrupt discharge."

"She has no parents, ma'am—she is an orphan."

"But she has friends, no doubt?" said Mrs. Slingsby, inquiringly.

"No, ma'am: I took her from the workhouse, on the recommendation of a lady—a friend of yours, ma'am—who visits them kind of places on a Sunday, distributing hymn-books."

"Disagreeable as the duty is, it must nevertheless be performed, Magdalen. And that duty, so incumbent upon us, is to turn the lost girl into the street. Pay her the wages—"

"She has nothing to receive, ma'am. I advanced her money to buy herself decent clothes—"

"Then let her go away without any money—since she has none to receive," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby. "To give her a single shilling, were to encourage her in that shameless career of profligacy whercon she has already so far entered."

"Your orders shall be obeyed, ma'am," replied Magdalen; and she withdrew to execute them—for she had a spite against the poor scullery-girl, who had been intriguing with one of this over-particular housekeeper's own lovers.

Shortly after this little occurrence which we have just related, Mr. Clarence Villiers made his appearance in Old Burlington Street.

He found his aunt alone in the drawing-room and, the moment he had paid his respects to her, he inquired for his much-beloved Adelaïs and her sister.

"They are safe and well, Clarence," answered Mrs. Slingsby. "But before I summon them, it will be necessary that we should have a little conversation relative to the proper and prudent course now to be adopted. Sit down, Clarence, and grant me your attention."

The young man obeyed, and prepared to listen with all the patience he could call to his aid; for much as he respected and really loved his aunt—whom he looked upon as a pattern of moral excellence and virtue—he nevertheless experienced the anxiety of a lover to find himself in the presence of Adelaïs.

"I shall not detain you long, Clarence," resumed Mrs. Slingsby: "and it is for your good that I am about to speak. In the first place, I feel it due to myself to explain to you that, in receiving those young ladies into my house the other evening—and at so late an hour—I was influenced solely by that affection which I entertain towards you, and by my conviction of your thorough integrity of purpose."

"The mere fact of my bringing those almost friendless girls to seek an asylum with you, dear aunt," said Clarence, "must prove to you how careful I was of their reputation."

"And it was to assist your upright views that I

received them without a moment's hesitation," added Mrs. Slingsby. "You know that if I had the means, you should long ago have been put in possession of a sufficient fortune to have enabled you to compete with Mr. Francis Curtis in bidding with the mercenary Mr. Torrens for his daughter. But—although my income is sufficient for my wants, and, thank heaven! for a few little purposes of charity—"

"My dear aunt!" interrupted Villiers; "wherefore renew an explanation so unnecessary?"

"Because I would not have you suppose, Clarence, that I would for an instant sanction any underhand proceedings in respect to your union with Miss Torrens, had it been possible to have ensured that aim by means of her father's consent. But," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "I conceive that there are so many extenuating features in the case, that I cannot regret having granted an asylum to that dear girl and her sister, ^{and} in thus securing them alike from the perils of London, and from the pursuit of their father."

"Your kindness towards them will render their hearts as grateful as mine is," exclaimed the young man warmly.

"During the few days that my house has become their home," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "they have endeared themselves to me by their affectionate dispositions—their tranquil habits—their readiness to please—and a thousand amiable qualities; and therefore—for their own sakes, as well as yours—I am ready to do all in my power to serve them. But should Mr. Torrens happen to discover their abode, conceive the scandal that would be created—the observations that would be excited!"

"My dear aunt, I would not for worlds compromise you in any way!" ejaculated Clarence. "But still—"

"Do not fear that I am anxious to rid myself of their charming company," added Mrs. Slingsby. "I am only desirous that you yourself should adopt due caution, so as to avoid being followed hither by any one who might be employed by Mr. Torrens to watch you."

"No imprudence on my part shall mar the success of my plans," returned Clarence. "The banns have been published at St. George's once already—and next Sunday will be the second time! It is scarcely probable that Mr. Torrens will become aware of this circumstance; and he certainly would not, without any previous hint, conjecture that the preliminaries for our union had been adopted in so fashionable a church as that in Hanover Square," added Clarence, with a smile. "Let two more Sundays pass without the abode of my Adelaïs being discovered, and she will then become indissolubly mine!"

"Have you seen any more of your kind friend, who so generously took your part the other evening?" inquired Mrs. Slingsby, after a pause.

"Captain Sparks!" exclaimed Clarence. "Not since I met him, as I before informed you, at a tavern in the Strand—"

"Avoid taverns, my dear nephew!" interrupted Mrs. Slingsby, a cloud overspreading her countenance; "for—by all I have ever heard or read concerning them—they are fearful sinks of iniquity."

"Oh! not the respectable taverns, aunt," replied Villiers. "I had purchased a very handsome pair of pistols to present to the Captain as a token of my esteem; and then I recollected that I was totally

unacquainted with his address. I flew to the great army-agents at Charing Cross; but there was no such name as Captain Sparks in the List. Well—I thought he might be in the Navy, and off-I went to the Admiralty; but no Captain Sparks! I therefore considered it fortunate when I accidentally met him in a tavern which I entered to procure some refreshment. He positively refused to accept the pistols—declaring that he had done nothing more than I should have done for him under similar circumstances. But I thought there was something singular in the merry laugh which burst from his lips, when I proffered the case containing the pistols. However, he is an excellent-hearted fellow—and I shall always hold myself his debtor. We walked together, on that occasion, as far as my own lodgings in Bridge Street, and he entertained me with a perfect fund of anecdote all the time. Indeed, I am as much pleased with him, as I feel myself under an obligation to him."

"Gratitude is a rare virtue in this world," remarked Mrs. Slingsby, who seldom lost an opportunity of letting drop a moral maxim. "And now," she continued, with a smile, "having taxed your patience to such an extent, I must give you the well-merited reward. My kind and generous friend, Sir Henry Courtenay, has advanced me a certain sum of money, one half of which I require for charitable purposes of my own; but the other I place at your disposal, to enable you to hire and furnish a suitable dwelling to receive your bride. Take this cheque, and to-morrow you can bring me my moiety."

"Oh! my dear aunt, have you borrowed of your friends to assist me?" exclaimed Clarence, overwhelmed by so much apparent generosity.

"Not entirely to assist you, my dear nephew," was the calm reply; "but partly, as you perceive, for myself. However,—say no more about the trifle which I present to you; and reward me by making a good use of it."

Clarence embraced his relative: Adelaïs and Rosamond were then summoned; and the lovers were soon happy in each other's society.

We must now afford the reader some explanation relative to Mrs. Slingsby's behaviour towards her nephew: and, in so doing, we shall throw additional light upon the character of this lady.

She was of a crafty—calculating disposition, and seldom performed any act, however trivial, without a selfish motive. The fact was that she had a very difficult part to play. Devoured with raging desires, she was compelled to adopt a calm, modest, and reserved exterior, and to conceal her debauchery beneath the cloak of religion. Sir Henry Courtenay was necessary to her in more ways than one: necessary as a lover—and necessary as a treasurer, for she was totally dependent upon him in a pecuniary sense. The report relative to the recovery of a portion of her late husband's fortune, was a mere fabrication to account for her comfortable mode of life. Still she considered her position to be so dangerous, that she was compelled to fortify it by all possible means. She really loved her nephew—for it often occurs that women of her description are capable of a strong attachment of this nature:—but even had she entertained no regard for him at all, she would have pretended to do so—because he was necessary to her. He was a means by which she could constantly trumpet forth her "charitable deeds," while she herself appeared unconscious that

they ever transpired. Taking good care that he should know all she did in the cause of religion or humanity, she led him to believe in a great many things which she did not do; and the consequence was that Clarence was never wearied of repeating, wherever he went, those praises which he conscientiously considered to be his aunt's due.

Now, when a near *relation* corroborates the statements made by *friends*, those statements receive a weight which places them beyond the pale of disbelief. Thus the world read Mrs. Slingsby's character as Clarence himself read it and reported it, and with such an amount of testimony in her favour, she could defy scandal. Even the most maliciously-inclined dared not venture a shake of the head, nor a shrug of the shoulder; for "surely her own nephew must know whether she were as good as she was represented? Relations seldom praise each other behind their backs; and when a dashing young fellow, like Clarence, was so enthusiastic in praise of his aunt, it was that he was thoroughly convinced of the sterling merit of her character?" Such would have been the arguments opposed to any detractive observations that scandal might dare to let drop concerning Mrs. Slingsby.

The lady, finding her nephew so necessary to her interests, naturally sought not only to maintain the most complete deception relative to herself in his mind, but also to attach him towards her by substantial acts of kindness. Thus she had readily consented to receive Adelaïs and Rosamond into her house, to oblige Clarence; and she now, with the same interested motive, made him a handsome pecuniary present. She let him know that she had been compelled to borrow the money (in advance of her imaginary income), to enhance the value of the gift, and also that the natural impression should arise in his mind—"Excellent aunt! she embarrasses herself to benefit me!"

The reader now fully understands how complete a mistress of duplicity—hypocrisy—and deceit was the widow of Old Burlington Street. Beneath that calm and placid demeanour—under that veil of sanctity—raged the most ardent lusts, and agitated the most selfish feelings. She was a living—walking—breathing lie. Her existence was one immense falsehood; and yet so well did she maintain the semblance of even the sternest virtue, that her real character was known only to two persons—Sir Henry Courtenay, and another whom it is not at present necessary to name.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. SHEEPHANKS.

IN a large room, on a first-floor in St. Martin's Lane, some three or four hundred persons, male and female, were assembled.

At one end of the apartment was a raised platform, in the middle of which stood a capacious arm-chair behind a desk; and on the said platform several sleek, oily, comfortable-looking gentlemen, all dressed in black, and wearing white cravats with no shirt-collars, were grouped together in conversation.

The body of the room was occupied by chairs for the accommodation of those who had "front-seat tickets," and forms for those who possessed "back-seat tickets."

It is a remarkable fact that the votaries of the Established Church invariably create social distinctions in the very places instituted to propagate or maintain their creed. Thus every church belonging to the "Establishment" has its pews for the rich and its pauper-seats; and in the assembly-rooms of the religious associations the same distinction is drawn between aristocracy and democracy. And these lines of demarcation are traced by men practising—or rather pretending to practise—a religion which proclaims that all are equal in the eyes of God!

Oh! the vile hypocrisy of these canting psalm-singers!

The room to which we have introduced our readers, was well lighted with wax-candles, and had two cheerful fires blazing away in the grates.

The atmosphere was warm—there were no unpleasant draughts—and the floor was covered with a thick drugget;—for your religious people are mightily fond of comfort; and comfort was certainly studied at the offices of the *South Sea Island Bible-Circulating Society*.

In the second row of the "front-seat ticket" department, sat Mrs. Slingsby and the Misses Torrens. The two latter had their veils carefully drawn over their faces; for Mrs. Slingsby had insisted upon their accompanying her to this "pious and soul-refreshing entertainment," as they had not previously stirred out of doors from the moment they had taken up their abode with her.

At a quarter-past six o'clock, two ushers, bearing white wands, passed up the room, preceding a short, stout, brandy-faced gentleman, who tried to look as demure and humble as he could, but who could not, however, subdue that consciousness of importance which seems to say, "Ah! now I am causing a sensation!"

And a sensation, too, he produced, sure enough; for the gentlemen began clapping their hands and stamping on the floor, while the ladies waved their handkerchiefs as if he were some victorious general who had just defeated a French army of a hundred thousand men.

Upon reaching the platform, the brandy-faced gentleman shook hands with the sleek and oily individuals before alluded to; and the "sensation" became more exciting on the part of the spectators, as if it were a very clever thing indeed to shake hands in public.

Then the brandy-faced man stepped a few paces back, and pretended to enter into very earnest conversation with some leading member of the Committee, while another member moved, in a drawing-room tone, "that their respected President, Mr. Jonathan Pugwash, do take the chair."

This proposal was received with renewed applause; and the brandy-faced gentleman (for he it was who delighted in the euphonious name of Pugwash) started as if quite astonished that such an honour should have been destined for him. He then proceeded to establish himself in the large arm-chair before mentioned; and in a voice which sounded as if he were talking inside a barrel, called upon "their respected friend, the Reverend Malachi Sawkins, to open the meeting with prayer."

Mr. Sawkins—a very demure-looking man indeed—proceeded to draw out a long extempore prayer, in the course of which he led his audience to infer that heaven favoured that particular Society

more than all others; and when he had concluded, the chairman rose to explain the object of the extraordinary assembly that evening, although the said object was already well known to every individual present—aye, and to every soul who, passing up or down St. Martin's Lane, might choose to stop and peruse the enormous bills placarded at the entrance.

Mr. Jonathan Pugwash commenced by expressing his thanks for the high honour done him by selecting him to preside over that meeting—an honour the more distinguished, inasmuch as it had been perfectly unexpected on his part. [*This was completely false, it having been settled in Committee three days previously that he was to preside on this occasion; but your zealots do not mind a white lie at times.*] He was well aware of his own unworthiness (*Cries of "No! no!"*): yes—he was an unworthy vessel—but he hoped the Lord would sustain him in the onerous duty thrust upon him. ("Amen!" in a hollow, sepulchral tone from the Rev. Malachi Sawkins.) He thanked the ladies and gentlemen—or he should rather say his Christian sisters and brethren present, for the kind—the handsome—the feeling manner in which they had contradicted his expressed belief of his own unworthiness. (*Cheers, and "Go it, Pugwash!" from a drunken gentleman in a remote corner of the room.*) He need scarcely inform the highly respectable and influential meeting then and there assembled, that the object of such assembly on that occasion was to hear certain accounts of the progress of the good cause, from the lips of a revered brother (*cheers*) who had just returned (*renewed cheers*) from a long (*more cheering*)—arduous (*prolonged cheering*)—and most perilous (*vociferous cheering*)—mission to the islands of the South Seas (*tremendous cheering, mingled with "Brayvo!" from the drunken gentleman in the remote corner.*) He need scarcely say that he alluded to their dear—venerated—respected—highly-prized—gifted—talented—persevering friend, Mr. Sheepshanks! (*Cheers.*) With these few observations, he would introduce Mr. Sheepshanks to the meeting. (*Prolonged cheering.*)

The chairman sat down in an awful state of perspiration; but, in another moment he rose again; for a little door at the back of the platform had just been opened by one of the ushers—and behold! Joshua Sheepshanks appeared before the enraptured spectators.

It would be impossible to describe the enthusiasm which now prevailed in the room. The cheering was tremendous—the waving of the ladies' handkerchiefs created a perfect gale of chill air—and the drunken gentleman in the corner shouted so vociferously that one old lady who sat near him would certainly have fainted (as she subsequently observed) if another old lady next to her had not happened, "by the merest accident in the whole world," to have a small flask of cognac in her muff, and most charitably to place the said flask at her disposal.

Mr. Sheepshanks was a tall, thin, sallow-faced man, with black hair combed sleekly over his forehead, and sharp, piercing grey eyes, which seldom settled anywhere—but when they did, it happened (singularly enough!) that they were sure to fix themselves on the prettiest faces in the room.

Order being restored, Mr. Sheepshanks rose to address the audience. Having expressed his gratitude for the truly Christian reception he had re-

ceived, he entered upon the subject so dear to all who had the good cause at heart. He stated that in the year 1823 the Committee of the Society had determined to send a missionary to some of the South Sea Islands to pave the way for the effectual carrying out of the objects of the Association. A sum of five hundred pounds was voted for the purpose; and he (Mr. Sheepshanks) had offered himself as a willing sacrifice to the good cause, although, as he perfectly well knew, at the risk of being roasted and eaten by the savages amongst whom he was to venture. Understanding that a French ship was to sail for the South Seas, from Cherbourg, on an exploring expedition, he had repaired to that port, and had taken a passage in the vessel alluded to. In due time, and after experiencing tremendous weather, the ship touched at the Cape of Good Hope, and thence proceeded towards the southern islands. "It was on the 14th of March, 1824," continued Mr. Sheepshanks, "that we anchored off the beautiful island of Squizzle-o-Koo; and I fell on my knees on the deck, to return thanks to that Providence which had at length brought me within sight of the scene of my labours. A refreshing influence came over me; and my heart leapt, like a porpoise on the wide waters, at the cheering thought that I was about to render myself useful amongst the benighted savages so near at hand. A boat was lowered; and the captain, the third mate, the purser, and myself were rowed ashore. I was provided with my Bible; the captain and the mate took with them quantities of looking-glasses, buttons, and toys; and the ungodly purser armed himself with a bottle of rum."

An awful groan burst from the Rev. Mr. Sawkins, whereat Mr. Pugwash, who had fallen asleep, woke up.

"Yes—dear Christian friends," exclaimed Mr. Sheepshanks; "a bottle of rum!"

"And no fool he!" cried the drunken gentleman in the corner.

"Order! order!" vociferated Mr. Pugwash, rubbing his eyes.

At this crisis, a gentleman of foreign appearance, well-dressed, and adorned with a pair of very fierce moustachios, advanced from the body of the room towards the platform; but at every three steps he took, he paused for a few moments to examine Mr. Sheepshanks with strict scrutiny by the aid of an eye-glass. At first he seemed uncertain relative to some idea which had entered his head; but the nearer he approached the platform, and the more closely he examined Mr. Sheepshanks, the fainter became his doubts and the stronger his suspicions.

At last—just as the missionary was about to resume the history of his adventures in respect to the island of Squizzle-o-Koo—the foreign stranger leaped upon the platform, confronted the pious gentleman, and said in an ironical tone, "How you do, Monsieur Shipshang? me vare much delight to see you dis vonce again."

Mr. Sheepshanks seemed confounded at the sudden apparition of the foreign gentleman; but, speedily recovering his self-possession, he said, "Really, sir, you have the advantage of me. But if you will step into the private office—behind there—for a short time, I—"

"Oh! yes—you really have de advantage on me, Monsieur Shipshang," interrupted the foreigner; "but you not get it again, do you see? How do

Madame Shipshang, and de little Shipshang as was born at my house?"

"This gentleman, sir," said the Reverend Mr. Sawkins, addressing the foreigner in a tone of awful solemnity, and pointing towards Mr. Sheepshanks, "is not married and has no children. His life is devoted to celibacy and good works."

"Good works!" ejaculated the Frenchman: "den vot for he come and swindle me——"

"Oh!" groaned the Reverend Mr. Sawkins, holding up his hands in horror at the supposed baseness of the imputation against the most savoury sensation amongst all present.

"Oh!" reverberated in a long echoing groan throughout the room; for, as the reader may suppose, this strange scene had excited a powerful sensation amongst all present.

"Ah! it all vare well," exclaimed the Frenchman, indignant at the awful groaning with which his words were received; "but let dis fellow Shipshang look me in de face, and——"

"Call in a constable!" roared Mr. Pugwash, the chairman.

"Give the Frenchman fair play!" cried several voices.

"Dat is all me do ask of de British public," said the Frenchman.

But while he turned to address these words to the audience, Mr. Sheepshanks disappeared with remarkable abruptness by the private door at the back of the platform.

"Where's our reverend brother?" demanded Mr. Pugwash, looking anxiously around.

"I am afraid he must be taken ill," returned Mr. Sawkins. "I will go and see."

And this reverend gentleman followed the pious missionary.

The Frenchman then proceeded to acquaint the audience that he kept an hotel at Cherbourg, where Mr. Sheepshanks arrived at the beginning of the year 1823; that the reverend gentleman continued to reside with him for upwards of ten months, spending money as profusely as if he possessed the purse of Fortunatus; that at the expiration of that period Mr. Sheepshanks departed, but returned at the end of a month, accompanied by a lady whom he represented to be his wife, and who presented him with a pledge of her affection some eleven months afterwards; that Mr. Sheepshanks and the lady, with the child, continued to honour the hotel with their presence until the middle of the year 1826, when they suddenly evaporated, leaving behind them a heavy bill unpaid and a portmanteau full of stones and straw; that business had brought the Frenchman to London, and curiosity had induced him to enter that assembly upon reading the placard, wherein the euphonious name of Sheepshanks prominently figured, at the door.

This narrative produced, as may be supposed, an extraordinary sensation amongst the saints gathered together on this occasion.

And no wonder! Was it, then, all a fabrication relative to Mr. Sheepshanks' visit to the South Sea Islands? Had he never proceeded farther than Cherbourg? were the funds of the Society lavished in riotous living and on a mistress? was it the better to carry out the deception that he had pretended to sail in a French ship, instead of an English one? was he, in a word, an unmitigated impostor? and were all the members of the Society his dupes?

These opinions seemed to be confirmed, when the Reverend Mr. Sawkins came back with the astounding intelligence that Mr. Sheepshanks was no where to be found in any part of the Society's offices.

Mrs. Slingsby was overwhelmed with grief, and her two fair companions with astonishment; and as they rode home in a hackney-coach, the pious widow never ceased from dilating on the tremendous injury which the "good cause" would receive from the exposure of the flagrant turpitude of Mr. Sheepshanks.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BARONET AND HIS MISTRESS.

ON the following day—at about twelve o'clock, and somewhat to the surprise of Mrs. Slingsby, who did not expect to see him so soon again—Sir Henry Courtenay paid the lady a visit.

She happened to be alone when he was announced; and there was a constraint—amounting almost to an embarrassment—in his manner which she immediately perceived, and which alarmed her.

"Has any thing happened, Henry?" she inquired anxiously, as he took a seat at some distance from her.

"Nothing, Martha—nothing," answered the baronet. "But I wish to have some very particular conversation with you."

"I am all attention," she said, her suspense increasing.

"Now do not be frightened," exclaimed Sir Henry. "Nothing has happened to annoy either you or me; but what I am about to propose to you, is rather of an embarrassing nature—and——"

"Then pray be quick and let me know what brings you hither this morning," said the lady, somewhat impatiently.

"Have patience!" cried the baronet. "The fact is I have taken a fancy in a certain quarter—and, though I have striven hard to wrestle against it, it is every hour growing more powerful than my opposition."

"What do you mean! what *can* you mean?" asked the widow, completely bewildered.

"Why do you receive into your house two young ladies of a beauty so ravishing——"

"Henry! is it possible?" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, a light suddenly breaking in upon her mind.

"It is very possible that I should feel an unquerable—an invincible passion for Rosamond Torenens," added the baronet, growing bolder now that the ice was fairly broken.

"And you tell me this to my face!" murmured the widow, in a hollow tone, while her countenance became purple with a rage which she dared not suffer to explode.

"It is expressly to you that I am compelled to make the avowal," was the deliberate reply; "since it is at your hands that I expect assistance."

"At my hands!" almost shrieked the widow.

"Beware how you alarm the house!" said the baronet. "You will do much better to listen to me attentively."

"Proceed," gasped Mrs. Slingsby.

"You are well aware that there are certain natures which cannot master their inclinations, however strenuously they may endeavour to do so,"

resumed Sir Henry Courtenay, drawing his chair closer to that on which his mistress was seated. "You yourself are of such a disposition—and I am not less so. It would have been impossible for you to remain chaste: your passions are of that ardour which must be gratified—or they would consume you."

"Wherefore this strange expatiation upon my failings?" inquired the widow bitterly.

"Simply to prove an extenuation for myself," was the response. "I have seen Rosamond but three times, and have not spoken a dozen words to her; and yet I am maddened with desire—devoured with cravings which the possession of her can alone assuage. I again assure you that I have essayed to conquer these feelings, for my sake—for hers—but principally for *yours*,—and all in vain! I do not love you the less—I shall not neglect you on her account. And, as a woman of the world," he added, fixing his eyes in a penetrating manner upon her countenance, as if to read the impression his words made on her mind,—“as a woman of the world, I repeat, you cannot imagine that it is possible for me always to remain faithful to you!”

"At least you are candid with me," observed the widow, her tone expressing bitter irony.

"That is the great merit of my present avowal," said the baronet calmly. "But how foolish you are to manifest so much annoyance. You are well aware that I cannot subdue my feelings, nor control my passions more than yourself; and it will be better for you to assist me—"

"Assist you in debauching that young girl—the sister of her whom my nephew is to marry!" ejaculated Mrs. Slingsby.

"Listen, Martha," exclaimed Sir Henry. "I have formed this sudden caprice—or whim—or whatever you may choose to term it; and I will spare no money and no trouble to accomplish my purpose. A man with twenty thousand a-year can afford a trifle to gratify his wishes in this or any other respect."

"But the idea is perfectly insane!" cried the widow. "Even if I were to consent to aid you in your purpose, the result must inevitably involve a fearful exposure."

"Not at all," replied the baronet. "The means are easy, and can be rendered perfectly secure. I gave you a thousand pounds yesterday—the largest sum you have ever yet had from me at one time; and I will present you with a cheque for *two* thousand more the day that Rosamond becomes mine."

"You would not marry her?" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone of unconcealed alarm.

"Yes—rather than not possess her," replied the baronet.

"Oh! this is truly absurd!" said the widow. "What! so powerful an attachment towards a young girl whom you have only seen three times!"

"Strange as it may appear, it is nevertheless a fact!" cried Sir Henry. "But there is a wide difference between the feelings I entertain towards you and her. You are necessary to me, to a certain extent—because you are an agreeable companion as well as a desirable woman. She is a mere child—but a very beautiful one; and, moreover, the sudden fancy I have taken for her is so strong that I cannot resist it. You see that my resolution is fixed. With or without your aid, I prosecute my purpose."

"If you are really so determined—"

"I am," said the baronet.

"Then I must assist you in this dangerous—difficult proceeding," added Mrs. Slingsby, somewhat consoled by the idea of the two thousand pounds that were to find their way into her purse as the price of her services. "But when I reflect on the matter, I behold a thousand perils from which I recoil. Were an exposure to take place, the entire fabric of—of—"

"Hypocrisy," suggested the baronet. "You and I need not mince words together."

"Well—hypocrisy," continued the lady, "would be thrown down—and I should stand revealed to the world in the most dreadful colours. Then, the real nature of *our* connexion would be instantly perceived—"

"But all these terrible evils are to be avoided by prudence," interrupted the baronet. "I am not more anxious for exposure than yourself; nor should I wish to compromise you. Our amour has existed for years—and the world suspects it not, even in the most distant manner;—we will contrive to retain the veil over it until the end."

"Then how do you wish me to proceed?" inquired the widow, with a cold shudder, as she thought of the perils attending the undertaking.

"By operating on the mind—by modelling the imagination of that young girl to suit my purpose," answered Sir Henry. "With a woman of the world like you, this is an easy task. Insinuate certain notions into her bosom—inflame her—excite her—"

"This is more difficult than you imagine," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby: "because she and her sister are constantly together."

"Devise a means to employ Adelaïs in one room for two or three hours at a time, while you have Rosamond with you in another," said Sir Henry. "If you enter on the task with a good will, you will find it easy enough."

"But in ten days Adelaïs will become the wife of Clarence; and the sisters, accompanied by him, will repair to Torrens Cottage to throw themselves at the feet of the incensed father. Rosamond will then quit my house altogether."

"Ten days are sufficient to imbue her now innocent mind with such new sensations—such voluptuous thoughts—such eager desires, that her surrender will be easy and certain," persisted the atrocious villain, who thus calmly reasoned on the means of undermining so much virtue.

"I do not think so," observed Mrs. Slingsby. "If I proceed too rapidly, I shall alarm her, instead of inflaming her imagination. Besides, you judge the world by what you yourself are, and by what you know of me. But, frail and guilty as I am, Henry," she added in an impressive tone, "believe me when I declare my conviction that more virtue is to be found in woman than you would be inclined to suspect."

Sir Henry laughed heartily at this observation; then, rising from his seat, he took up his hat, saying, "At all events, dearest Martha, act so that I may present you with the cheque as soon as possible."

He kissed her, and departed from the house, chuckling at the success of his endeavour to make his mistress the instrument of his diabolical design against the pure—the beautiful—the unsuspecting Rosamond.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TOM RAIN AND JACOB.

It was Saturday evening; and Rainford was proceeding up Gray's Inn Lane, wrapped in his white great coat, and with a woollen "comforter" reaching up almost to his nose, when he suddenly felt some one pull him by the sleeve.

He turned round, and, by the light of a lamp, beheld the lad Jacob.

"Well, you young rascal!" exclaimed Tom—but with an anger more affected than real, for he was not a man to cherish vindictive feelings towards an enemy so utterly unworthy his resentment as that pale, weak, and sickly boy: "I wonder you have the face to accost me, after joining in that abominable scheme to intrude upon the privacy of my dwelling three or four nights ago."

"I hope you will forgive me, Mr. Rainford," said the lad: "for you *must* know," added he emphatically, "it was n't altogether my fault. I was bound to obey the man who gave me food. But do you know, sir, what has become of *him*? Oh! Mr. Rainford—I am well aware that he *did* deserve punishment at your hands; but—pray forgive me—I hope—"

"You hope that I did not kill him?" said the highwayman in a deep, hollow-toned voice. "Why—do you suppose that I am a likely person to commit murder—intentionally?"

"Oh! no—no," replied the boy. "And yet—"

"And yet what?" asked Rainford.

"And yet it is so strange that he should never have been seen at any of his usual haunts," added Jacob.

"Come along with me," said Rainford abruptly. "We cannot stand talking in the street—and I want to have some conversation with you. But do you know any place close at hand—any public-house, I mean—where we could have a private room for an hour or so?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jacob, after a moment's reflection. "This way."

He turned abruptly down into a narrow, dark, dirty thoroughfare, called Baldwin's Gardens, and conducted the highwayman into a low public-house, where, upon inquiry, they were immediately accommodated with a private room on the second floor.

Rainford ordered the fire to be lighted and a bottle of wine to be brought up; and when these instructions were complied with, he renewed the conversation with Jacob.

"And so nothing has been heard of Old Death?" he said, in as tranquil a manner as he could assume.

"Nothing," replied Jacob. "A man named Josh Pedler called at Bunce's this morning early, and wanted to see Mr. Bones, on account of a thief, known as Tim the Snammer, who was to go up before the magistrate to-day; and it appears that Mr. Bones had promised to get him off. Pedler was in a dreadful way when he heard that we had n't seen any thing of the old man for two or three days; and he swore that it was all a hoax, and that Bones wanted to stick to the money that had been paid him, and shirk the job. Then comes a girl about an hour afterwards; and she said she was Tim the

Snammer's wife—Mutton-faced Sal they call her;—and a dence of a rumpus she made also."

"Do you know a person called Tidmarsh?" demanded Rainford, after a few moments' reflection—for he was anxious to learn if the boy were acquainted with the establishments in Turnmill and Red Lion Streets.

"I know him by name very well—and that's all," replied Jacob. "He is a fence, and lives somewhere in Clerkenwell. But pray tell me, Mr. Rainford, if you know what has become of the old man."

"I can tell you nothing about him, my boy," said the highwayman. "Surely he was not so very kind to you—"

"He kind! Oh! no—far from that!" cried Jacob, in a tone of evident sincerity. "But I was so dependant on him, that—unless I turn thief again—as I once was—"

He stopped short, and burst into tears.

"My poor lad," said Tom Rain, affected by this ebullition of grief on the part of the wretched boy, "if you are afraid of wanting bread, you may banish those alarms—at least for the present."

And he threw a handful of sovereigns upon the table.

"Are these for me?" cried Jacob, scarcely able to believe his eyes.

"Yes—every one of them," answered the highwayman. "But on this condition—that you tell me how Old Death discovered my *late* abode in Lock's Fields, and what was his object in entering it along with you and that sneaking fellow, Toby Bunce."

"I will tell you all—everything I know, Mr. Rainford," exclaimed Jacob. "But," he added slowly, "you will find that I do not deserve this kindness at your hands."

"I can scarcely blame you for obeying the person on whom you were dependant," said the highwayman. "Come—gather up the money, and make haste with your information."

As Jacob secured the gold about his person, his dark eyes were lighted up, and his cheeks were flushed with a glow of animation.

"I can tell you much more than you suppose, Mr. Rainford," he resumed in a few moments; "and if I begin at the proper place, what I have to say will go farther back than the affair the other night in Lock's Fields."

"Then begin with the beginning, Jacob," said Tom, lighting a cigar. "There—drink another glass of wine; and now fire away. But mind and tell me nothing save the truth; for I shall soon see if you are deceiving me."

"I won't deceive you, Mr. Rainford," cried the boy; "and will soon convince you that I am in earnest. Besides, it is my interest to make a friend of you—even if it was n't my inclination. And now to begin. You remember the morning you was had up at Bow Street? Well—Old Death had told me to watch you when you came out of Tullock's—to dog you about—to find out where you lived and any thing else I could glean concerning you."

"What was that for?" demanded Tom.

"He did not tell me *then*," answered Jacob—"but I have ascertained since—and you will be able to guess by and bye. Well, I *did* follow you that morning—I saw you nabbed by Dykes, the runner—and I went up to Bunce's to tell Old Death what had happened. Then he cut off to Watkins and Bertinshaw, who came and bailed you. I was



ordered to watch about the police-court, and see where you went to; and I followed you to Pall Mall—then I dogged you back again—and when the Jewess's case was over, I lost sight of you somehow or another."

"And you duly made your report to Old Death?" said Tom inquiringly.

"Of course," replied Jacob. "Two or three days afterwards I was set to watch you again, when you left Bunce's one afternoon; and I followed you down to an eating-house in the Strand. You stayed there about two hours; and at length you came out with a tall, handsome young gentleman—"

"Ah! I recollect!" cried the highwayman: "it was Clarence Villiers. But go on, my boy."

"I only mention all these little things to convince you that I am telling the exact truth," said Jacob.

"Well—from the Strand I followed you and the gentleman as far as Bridge Street, Blackfriars, where you parted. I dogged you, Mr. Rainford, over to the Elephant and Castle Tavern, where you met a lady and the little boy—"

"Yes—Charley Watts!" ejaculated the highwayman, gradually becoming more interested in

Jacob Smith's narrative, because each successive step thereof afforded fresh evidence of its truth.

"You joined the lady and the little boy," continued Jacob; "and when you all stopped for a short time at the window of a jeweller's shop, the lady lifted up her veil—and I knew her again."

"Ah!" cried Tom, with a sudden start.

"Yes, sir,—I recognised Miss Esther de Medina—But are you angry, sir? have I said anything to offend you?"

"No—no, Jacob," returned the highwayman, the cloud which had gathered upon his countenance suddenly disappearing. "Go on, my boy."

"Then I saw you take the lady and the little boy into the shop, and you bought a pair of ear-rings, which you gave to the lady; and as you came out again, I heard you say to her, '*This present is a kind of recompense for the diamonds which I made you give me*,' or something to the same meaning."

"Yes—I remember that I did make use of those or similar words!" cried Rainford. "But how the deuce did it happen that I never once caught a glimpse of you?"

"Oh! sir—I acted with so much caution," replied

the lad; "and then you did not suspect that you was watched."

"True!" said Tom thoughtfully. "And of course you reported all this to Old Death?"

"I followed you on to Lock's Fields, and then returned to Seven Dials, where I told Mr. Bones and Mrs. Bunce all I had seen and heard."

"And what did they say? Tell me every thing, Jacob," exclaimed the highwayman.

"They seemed very much surprised to think that you and Miss Esther were intimate together——"

Jacob suddenly paused—for again did a dark cloud overspread Tom Rain's countenance.

"Go on, Jacob," he said, observing that the lad was alarmed. "I am subject to a sudden pain—but it is nothing at all. Go on, I say. You were telling me that Old Death and that disgusting woman, Mrs. Bunce, were very much astonished at a certain circumstance. Well—and what did they say?"

"They asked me whether either you, sir, or the lady took any little thing—when the jeweller's back was turned," replied Jacob, timidly, "but I assured them that you did not."

A scornful smile curled the highwayman's lips, and then he puffed away violently at his cigar—apparently wrapped in deep reflection.

"Shall I tell you any more, sir?" asked Jacob, when a few minutes of profound silence had elapsed.

"Yes, my boy: go on!" cried Tom, turning towards him again.

"The very next night," resumed Jacob, "Mr. Bones and me were walking down Southampton Row, Russell Square, you know—when I observed Miss Esther de Medina in a shop——"

"Where there was a post-office?" ejaculated the highwayman, hastily.

"Just so, sir. And she was reading a letter," continued Jacob. "Then me and Old Death followed her down to another post-office—it was in Holborn—where she posted a letter which she had with her. I crept close up to her and saw the address on it just before she dropped it into the box."

"And what was that address?" demanded Rainford.

"*T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields,*" was the answer.

"And you of course told *that* to Old Death?"

"Yes—and he desired me to follow the lady to see where she lived; which I did, and traced her to Great Ormond Street. Then I went back to Bunce's, and acquainted Mr. Bones with this fact also. He was very much pleased; and soon afterwards you came in. He then told you about going to Shooter's Hill to stop a tradesman and his wife; but I afterwards found out that it was only a gag to get you out of the way next night."

"Ah! I thought as much!" cried Rainford. "And now, I suppose, we come to the visit which Mr. Bones, Toby Bunce, and yourself paid to my lodgings?"

"Exactly so," said Jacob. "Early the next morning I was ordered by Old Death to post myself all day long in Great Ormond Street, and see that Miss Esther did not go out. I kept watch, and saw her several times at the window just for a moment: so I knew she was at home. In the evening Old Death and Mr. Bunce came and fetched me, and we went over to a public-house opposite your lodgings in Brandon Street. On the way I learnt what

they meant to do; for it was to carry off the boy——"

"Poor little Charley Watts!" ejaculated Rainford, totally unprepared for this announcement. "But what harm had he done to them? or what could they want with him?"

"I do n't exactly know, sir," replied Jacob. "Indeed, I do n't think Toby Bunce knew himself. But I can't help thinking that it was somehow or another connected with a certain letter which Old Death let fall, and which I picked up and kept. It bears the signature of *Sarah Watts*——"

"The poor woman who died at Bunce's house!" cried the highwayman. "Where is that letter?"

"Here, sir," answered Jacob; and with these words he produced the document from his pocket, and handed it to Tom Rain.

The highwayman hastened to peruse it with the greatest interest and attention; but he was evidently disappointed when he perceived that it afforded no clue to the person to whom it was originally intended to be sent.

"I shall keep this letter, Jacob," he said, after some minutes of profound reflection.

"Do so, Mr. Rainford," returned the lad. "And now you see that I am acting sincerely with you."

"Quite," remarked the highwayman, in an absent manner; for he suddenly remembered the circumstance of Old Death declaring that he had lost a particular letter on the memorable night which was marked with so many strange occurrences. "Yes, Jacob," he continued, after a long pause, "you are right. It must have been in connexion with this letter that the old man wanted to carry off the boy. Perhaps he had discovered some clue to unravel the mystery of Charley's birth, and meant to turn the secret to his own advantage? But, if so, he must have had some better trace than this letter, which certainly says a great deal, and yet leaves the one grand point—who *Charley's mother really is*—in complete darkness! However," added Tom, who had been musing aloud, rather than addressing his remarks to Jacob, "time will perhaps clear up all."

"You see, sir," continued Jacob, "I was set to watch in Great Ormond Street to find out whether Miss Esther went over to you——"

"To me!" ejaculated Rainford, as if taken by surprise. "But—go on, my boy—go on!"

"And as I knew that she was at home when Old Death and Toby Bunce came to join me there," pursued the lad, "we of course thought it was all right. You may, therefore, judge how Old Death and me were surprised, when we went up into the bed-room at your lodgings——"

"Enough of that, Jacob!" cried Rainford, starting uneasily. "And now tell me why Old Death seemed so anxious all along to find out every thing he could about me?"

"Lord! sir, can't you guess?" exclaimed the boy. "He knew that you could be useful to him, and he wanted to get you completely into his power. By knowing all that concerned you, he——"

"I understand, Jacob," again interrupted the highwayman; "and it is just as I suspected. You are a good lad for telling me all this—and I will not leave you to want—in case," he added hastily, "your old master should not happen to turn up again. But I do not think I shall stay many days in London, Jacob. However, I will see you again shortly——"

and we will have a talk together about what is best to be done for you. One word, by the bye—do you know how this letter which you gave me, happened to fall into Old Death's hands?"

"Not all, sir—unless Mrs. Bunce found it about the poor woman who died the other night at her house."

"That is what I suspect," observed Rainford. "Indeed it must have been so. The deceitful woman!—after my paying her so handsomely, to keep back the document! But it has found its way to my pocket at last, in spite of her and Old Death. And now, Jacob, tell me about yourself. How long have you been in the service of Mr. Benjamin Bones?"

"I wish you had time, sir," said the boy, "to listen to my story: it would be a relief to me to tell it—for I already feel towards you as I never felt to any one before. Indeed, I was sorry to be employed against you in any way: but I could n't help myself. I remember the evening that I watched you over to Lock's Fields:—I was so moved—I hardly can describe how—by seeing that little boy Charley with you; for I thought how good you was towards him, and what an excellent heart you must have, —and when I got back to Bunce's, I could n't pluck up courage to tell Old Death any thing about you, for fear he might mean you some injury. However," added Jacob, wiping his eyes, "he did get it all out of me at last——"

"Never mind, my lad," interrupted Rainford, moved by Jacob's contrition: "all you have told me this evening has fully atoned for the mischief you previously did me. Besides, as I before said, you were forced to obey your master. And now," he added, after referring to his handsome gold repeater, "I do n't mind if I sit another hour with you here; and while I smoke my cigar, you shall tell me the history of your life."

"I will, sir," exclaimed the boy, eagerly. "But I warn you before-hand it is a long one—that is, if I tell it as I should like to do."

"Tell it in your own way, my boy," cried Rainford; "and never mind the length."

The highwayman settled himself in a comfortable manner in his chair; and Jacob proceeded to relate the history of his life.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE HISTORY OF JACOB SMITH.

"My earliest recollections are associated with the occupation of playing all day long in the streets, in company with other infants. This was in Upper Whitecross Street, St. Luke's; where I and those other children lived with a woman, who pretended to keep a boarding-school at which she received children to live with her altogether for one shilling and eight-pence a-week each: but she used to turn us all out early in the morning with a piece of hard mouldy bread to nibble for our breakfast, and fetch us home again when it grew dusk in the evening. She would then give us each another piece of bread for supper, and we went to bed. But what a bed! A few old sacks thrown over a heap of straw in a little room about six feet long by four and a half in width, served upwards of a dozen children as a sleeping-room. There we used to cry

ourselves to rest, famished with insufficiency of food—and awake again in the morning to undergo fresh privations.

"I said there were about twelve of us under the care of this Mother Maggs—as she was called. They chiefly belonged to very poor parents, who were engaged all day long at work, and were therefore glad to get rid of their children, who would otherwise only be an encumbrance to them. Some few were, however, the illegitimate offspring of poor servant-girls in place; but nearly all had parents who came to see them from time to time and perhaps gave them a few pence. I was not, however, so fortunate as the rest; for no one ever came to see me—at least that I was aware of—until I was about nine years old; and I heard that the twenty-pence a-week allowed for my board and lodging, was left regularly for Mother Maggs at the neighbouring chandler's shop every Saturday morning. Mother Maggs seemed to think that I had really no friends—for, though she bullied us all pretty well, she bullied me ten thousand times more than the rest.

"The habit of turning a dozen little children, some of whom were only just able to walk, into the street in the way I have described, was not likely to be always unattended with disagreeable consequences. Sometimes a child was run over, and either severely wounded or killed. In the latter case, no Coroner's Inquest ever sate on the body: the exposure of Mother Maggs's neglect towards us, would have drawn the attention of the parochial authorities towards her. But when a death happened in that way, the old woman used to put the body into a sack and carry it some distance into the country, where she would sink it in a pond or ditch. Often, however, the corpse of a dead child has been allowed to remain in our room till it was quite putrid, Mother Maggs not having time or inclination to remove it before. And, on those occasions, we *who were alive in that room* were so frightened to be with the dead body in the dark, that we shrieked and screamed till the noise reached the old woman's ears in the public-house next door; and so savage was she at being disturbed in her gin and her gossip, that she has half murdered us by way of making us hold our tongues!

"Sometimes a child was lost; and if the parents, on being informed of it, expressed regret or anger, Mother Maggs would take some trouble to find it again: if not, she did not put herself out of the way respecting the matter. In addition to her boarding-house for children, she let out lodgings to persons of either sex; and, as she was not particular so long as she got paid, her house was nothing more or less than a common brothel. She was always saying she had no time to do any thing which ought to be done: and if being all day in the public-house was a necessary duty, she certainly had no time for other purposes. Though not often tipsy, she was never actually sober—but in a constant state of muzziness. Liquor did not improve her temper: on the contrary it made her irritable—sometimes ferocious; and I have seen her fight with other women until her face was covered with long seams made by the finger-nails, and pouring with blood.

"You cannot suppose that *all* these things which I have just told you or that I am going to tell you directly, in connexion with Mother Maggs's esta-

blishment, were noticed or understood by me when I was quite a child there: but you must remember that I stayed at that den until I was nine, and in the course of those years all I saw made a deep impression on my mind; and what was then dark and unintelligible to me, has since been made clear and plain by experience and by reflection on those scenes and circumstances.

"You will wonder how my wretched companions and myself managed to live, since we only had a piece of bread each, night and morning. We kept body and soul together in a variety of ways, chiefly feeding, like swine, upon all the offal and remnants of vegetables, cooked or raw, that we found in the street. There was a dust-bin in the court where Mother Maggs's house was in Whitecross Street; and every day, just upon one o'clock, we used to crowd round it, waiting till the neighbours came to empty their potato-peelings or the refuse of their meals into that general receptacle. Then we would greedily appropriate to our use the scraps which not even the very poorest of the poor chose to eat. The potato-peelings (most poor families skin their potatoes after they are boiled) were quite a dainty to us: the heads and bones of fish and such-like refuse were also welcome to our empty stomachs. Then we were accustomed to go prowling about the street to snatch a slice of raw bacon or a bit of cheese from the board in front of a butter-shop; or steal a turnip or a carrot from an old woman's stall; or else lay unlawful hands upon the horses' flesh in the cats'-meat shops. This last article of food was much fancied by us. It was comparatively easy to steal; and when we did get such a prize as a large lump of carrion, with a stick thrust through it, we felt as happy for the time being as if we had found a treasure. Then we used to conceal ourselves in some dark court, and take a bite round each in his turn—until it was all gone. I am afraid I disgust you with these details; but you desired me to tell my story in my own way—and I want you to understand the dreadful mode of life which thousands of poor children lead in the wealthiest city in the world. I am sure, when I have thought of it all since, and when I see little boys and girls paddling in that neglected manner about the streets, my blood runs cold at the idea that while some human beings are riding in their carriages and living in palaces, others are prowling in the low neighbourhoods, happy if they can steal a lump of putrid carrion!

"You may next ask what we did for clothes—it being very clear that Mother Maggs could not supply us with wearing apparel out of twenty-pence a week. Well—the fact is we scarcely had any clothes on at all. As for a cap or shoes and stockings, I declare solemnly I never wore any one of those articles from the earliest period of my recollection until I was nine years old. A little ragged frock, and that was all: yes, that was all—summer or winter! But where did even the ragged frock come from? I really hardly know: I am at a loss to say exactly how we did get even that one garment each. Sometimes a child would be taken away by its parents, who might, perhaps, bring it some decent clothing: then the cast-off rags in this case would fall to the lot of the most ragged of those who were left behind. Now and then a slop-seller in the neighbourhood would give one of us some old frock which was useless to himself: and occasionally we

would steal one, when we could. You may ask me why we did not steal shoes also? So we did, if an opportunity served: but then we could do without shoes, and the eldest of the lot of us was on those occasions commissioned to sell the plunder at a rag-shop, to afford means to buy a little better food than usually fell in our way. These occurrences were, however, rare—so rare, that they constituted perfect holidays in the hideous monotony of our famished lives;—for the shopkeepers in poor neighbourhoods are constantly on the alert to watch the movements of the juvenile prowlers.

"The ages of the children under the care of Mother Maggs averaged from three to ten; and the eldest of course bullied the youngest, while Mrs. Maggs bullied us all. Misery did not make us little ones friendly together. On the contrary, we fought, quarrelled, and ill-treated each other as much as we could. I must relate to you one anecdote—although I now shudder when I think of it, and have often since shed tears of repentance. There was one boy, named Tib Tucker, about eight years old, who used to behave in a more merciless manner towards me than the rest did. He would take away my bread from me whenever he caught me eating it apart and alone; and he laid to me many thefts on Mother Maggs's cupboard which he himself committed. These false reports got me many and many a good beating from the enraged hag; and, in a word, this boy's tyranny became so insufferable, that I was resolved to adopt some desperate measure to put an end to it. I was then but little more than six years old: a fiendish instinct of revenge, however, urged me to act. I secreted a pin about my rags; and one day when Tib Tucker was trying to take away the morsel of mouldy bread which Mother Maggs had just given me, I suddenly thrust the pin into his right eye. He screamed in dreadful agony, and brought down Mother Maggs into the court. I had not run away—terror, or rather horror at what I had done, nailed me to the spot. The bully's tale was soon told. I expected to be half murdered by the dreadful woman: but, to my surprise, she suddenly took my part—declared that I had shown a proper spirit—and consoled Tib Tucker with the assurance that if he would only permit me to operate on the other eye in the same manner, he would prove a perfect fortune to his parents. 'There's nothing like a blind child to draw alms,' she said: 'but one eye's no good—you should be blind of both.'—I remember her words as well as if they had only been uttered yesterday; and, the more so, as they seemed to be prophetic—as I shall explain presently.

"The terrible vengeance which I had taken upon my persecutor, who lost his eye in consequence, not only awed him in future, but made me feared by all the rest; and my existence grew somewhat less wretched—at least in reference to the treatment I experienced from my companions. Mother Maggs also seemed to change towards me—whether through fear, or admiration at what she termed '*my spirit*,' I cannot say. I was less bullied by her—but not a whit better fed.

"About six weeks after the incident which I have related, the parents of Tib Tucker returned to London from the country where they had been harvesting. They passed the evening with Mother Maggs, and great quantities of gin were sent for from the public house. This I afterwards learnt from my

companions; for, as to myself, I kept out of the way through fear of being punished by the boy's parents for the vengeance which I had wreaked upon him. When it was quite dark, I returned to the house, and stole up to the miserable garret where my companions were already huddled together on the straw and old sacks. Tib Tucker was amongst them; for I heard him talking about a promise his parents had made to take him with them into the country, where they were going again in a few days. One of the eldest girls—for, I forgot to say, Mother Maggs's juvenile boarders were of both sexes—asked him what his parents had said about the accident. He replied that they had laughed at it, and had declared that they would turn it to some good account. Scarcely had he thus spoken, when the door opened, and Mother Maggs appeared, with a candle in her hand. Ordering Tib Tucker to get up and follow her, she added that his father and mother had a little treat in store for him, and had meant him all along to sit up to supper. Tib was overjoyed at these news, and made haste to accompany Mother Maggs to a lower room where she had left his parents; and we, in our miserable dark garret, envied the boy who had a good supper in view.

"I remember—Oh! well do I remember, how I cried that night, to think that no friends ever came to see me, and that indeed I was ignorant whether my parents were alive or not. I had often asked Mother Maggs whether she knew my father and mother; but I invariably received a cuff by way of reply—and therefore at length grew tired of putting the question. There were, however, times when my wretched—forn—abandoned condition almost broke my heart; for, young as I was, I knew that there were boys and girls in the world much better off than myself!

"While Tib Tucker was absent, the other children began to discourse amongst themselves, saying how lucky he was to come in for a good supper; and then they set to work to guess what the meal was likely to consist of. But all on a sudden a dreadful shriek echoed through the house, and startled us in our miserable garret. There we lay—crouching and huddling nearer to each other, holding our breath, not daring to utter a word, and filled with vague alarms, as if some dreadful danger hung over us. At length sleep came to my relief. When I awoke in the morning and ran down into the court, the first object that met my view was the wretched boy Tib Tucker, being led away by his parents—for he was now blind of both eyes!

"I was so frightened, that I ran into the street, where I wandered about all day—forgetting even the pangs of hunger. I had suddenly conceived such a dreadful terror of Mother Maggs, that I had not dared to present myself at her room-door to obtain my usual morsel of bread, along with the rest. It was a very rainy day, and yet I remember that I roved and roved about the whole neighbourhood, at one time crying bitterly—at another stupified, though still moving about like a sleep-walker. When the evening came on, I was so tired and hungry that I was forced to retrace my way to the horrible den, which I only discovered again with the greatest difficulty. Mother Maggs did not take any notice of my absence from the morning distribution of bread, but gave me my evening ration along with the rest; and once more did I return to the straw and filth of the close garret.

"Months and years passed—and I reached the age of nine. The last few months opened my eyes to more wickedness than I had as yet known or dreamt of. I just now told you that Mrs. Maggs's juvenile boarders consisted of boys and girls; and I believe you understood that we all huddled together in the same garret. It was a regular pig-stye, in which we wallowed like swine: and like that of brutes also was the conduct of the eldest boys and girls. If the other rooms in the house were used as a brothel by grown-up persons, no stew could be more atrocious than our garret. The girls were more precocious than the boys, and the latter were corrupted by the former. Mere children of nine and ten practised the vices of their elders. But, my God! let me draw a veil over this dreadful scene. Oh! sh—! I have seen much—gone through much; but the mere thought of the horrible licentiousness—the beastliness—the monstrous depravity that took place there, even now makes my blood run cold in my veins!

"And can you wonder that such should be the case? Not one of all us children had ever been taught what virtue was; and all that we knew of crime was that it was something which a constable took you up for. We had not the least notion of the Saviour—none of us had ever heard that the Son of God died for the sins of the world. I had once seen a Bible, because I stole one from a book-stall; and the eldest girl, who went to sell it, gathered from what was said by the person who bought it, that it *was* a Bible. But even if I had previously known that the book was called a Bible, I should not the less have stolen it; because I could not read, and no one had ever told me at that time what the Bible really was. We had all heard of the name of God, and used it pretty often too—for oaths were familiar to us even when we could only lisp them: but we knew not who God was, and had no one to tell us—even if we had wished to learn. You may think it strange that there should be children of even ten years old in London who are completely ignorant of every thing concerning religion; but I can assure you that I have met with youths and girls of fifteen or sixteen who were equally in the dark in that respect.

"I was nine years old when Mother Maggs one day fetched me out of the street where I was playing in the gutter with my companions, and took me into her own room, where I saw Mr. Bones for the first time—I mean the first time as far as my recollection is concerned. He looked at me a long time; and then turning to the old woman, said, 'I don't think you have taken the very best care of him.'—'Yes, I have,' she answered, 'He has had his belly-full every day of his life: bread-and-butter for breakfast and supper; potatoes for dinner on week days, with may-be a bit of pudding or so now and then; and always a good dinner on a Sunday. Have n't you, Jacob, dear?'—and, as she asked me this question, she gave a terrific frown, unseen by Old Death, and the meaning of which I well understood. So I muttered a 'yes;' and she seemed satisfied.—'But I am going to take him away all the same, Mrs. Maggs,' said Mr. Bones; 'because he is of an age now to be useful to me.'—'I hope you will recommend me where you can,' cried Mother Maggs. 'I do all I can to make the poor little dears happy; and if Jacob is so shabby just the very day you drop down upon us, like, it's only because

his new frock is in the suds; and as for shoes and stockings, it makes boys hardy to go without them.'—I do not remember that Old Death made any answer to these observations; because the portion of the dialogue which I have just detailed, produced so deep an impression on my mind—young as I was—that had it been continued, I should most probably have recollected the rest. But *this* I cannot forget—that when Old Death told me to follow him, and Mother Maggs took me in her arms to embrace me at parting, I screamed with affright—for the spectacle of the blind boy instantly recurred to my memory!

"Old Death took me to a shop in Whitecross Street, and bought me a complete suit of clothes—shabby and mean, it is true; but royal robes compared to the rags I now threw off. And how great was my astonishment—how wild was my delight, when I was actually supplied with a pair of stockings and shoes! Never before—never since, have I known such perfect joy as I felt at that minute. Sight restored to the blind could not be more welcome than were those articles. Not that I required them—for my feet were injured to nakedness, and to walk even on the pointed flints:—but I experienced an indescribable sensation of mingled pride and satisfaction which made me supremely happy. My joy was, however, somewhat rudely interrupted by a hard blow on the head which Old Death bestowed upon me, because I dared to laugh in the fulness of my poor heart; and then I burst into tears. He cursed me for a 'snivelling fool,' and ordered me to put on the cap which he had also bought me, and make haste to accompany him. The cap was another article of clothing till then quite strange to me; and once more my tears were succeeded by smiles!

"At length the purchases were complete; and I followed Old Death from the shop. But I walked as if I was tipsy. The cap seemed to be quite a weight on my head; and the shoes threatened every moment to trip me up. I have never worn skates,—but I can fancy how a person must feel when he puts them on for the first time; and I imagine that my awkwardness in stockings and shoes was something of the same kind. Near the point where Upper Whitecross Street joins Old Street Road, I beheld my late companions huddled together at the mouth of a passage belonging to a pawnbroker's shop. They did not know me, till I called some of them by name; and then they could not believe their eyes. I must have seemed a kind of prince to them. They instantly overwhelmed me with questions—but Old Death looked back and called me in a cross tone, and I hurried away. I declare solemnly that the tears started from my eyes as I thus separated from the companions of all my infant misery; and though I knew not whether my own fate was about to be improved, still my heart was smitten with the idea that I was leaving them behind to their wretchedness—their rags—their starvation—and their foetid den at Mother Maggs's house. Never until that instant had I experienced the least sympathy in their behalf: but then—at that moment—I felt as if I could have remained with them, and loved them!

"Mr. Bones conducted me to some public-house—I can't recollect where it was, but I think it must have been in Brick Lane, St. Luke's,—and there he ordered bread and cheese and ale. What a glorious dinner did I make that day! Never had

I tasted any thing so delicious before! The ~~cheese~~ was so nice—the bread so white and new,—and the ale—it was good beyond all description. At least, so the food and drink then appeared to me: and what was better still, was that I was allowed to eat as much as I chose! When we had ended our meal, Old Death began to talk very seriously to me—for we were alone in the room together. He gave me to understand that he had found me, when quite a baby, lying on the steps of a workhouse—that he had taken me to some good, kind woman whom he knew, and who had treated me well—that afterwards he had been obliged to place me, when I was three years old, with Mother Maggs—and *that I therefore owed every thing to him*. I naturally believed at the time that I was under the deepest obligations to him; and then he proceeded to inform me that I might be useful to him in certain ways, and that if I did all he told me and was a good boy, he would never desert me. I of course listened with as much respect as it was in my power or nature to show; and, though I did not quite understand all he said to me, I was nevertheless impressed with the conviction that he had a right to do what he chose with me, and that I was bound to obey him.

"We remained some time at the public-house—indeed, if I remember right, until it was dusk; because Old Death had a great deal to say to me, and as I was so very young and so miserably ignorant, it was not an easy matter for him to make me understand his meaning. But there can be no doubt that he laboured to convince me of the right which certain privileged persons had to prey upon others who were not so privileged;—or, in plainer terms, that whenever I could obtain a handkerchief, a purse, or any thing else worth taking, and in such a manner that there was no chance of my being detected, I was perfectly justified in availing myself of the opportunity. My morals had not been so carefully attended to, as to excite any repulsive feelings at this species of reasoning: on the contrary, having from my infancy practised the art of pilfering pudding from cooks'-shops, bits of bacon from cheesemongers' windows, carrots and turnips from old women's stalls, and lumps of tripe or carrion from the boards of cats'-meat establishments, I was well prepared to go a step farther. There can be no doubt that Old Death was all along aware of the real nature of Mother Maggs's house and of the manner in which she reared the children entrusted to her. A man of his experience could not help knowing all this; and it was not probable that he was deceived by the lying statements she made to him relative to the manner in which I had been treated—although he took, as far as I recollect, no notice of her words. In fact, he had intentionally placed me in a position to learn every thing that was bad—to fulfil an apprenticeship of petty vice, that I might enter on a career of crime, whereof the profits were to be his own!

"Taking me now in a somewhat kind manner by the hand, he led me down to St. Paul's Churchyard. Although having hitherto lived within a mile of that place, I had never been there before. It is true that from the garret windows of Mother Maggs's dwelling, I had sometimes seen the huge dark dome surmounted by the cross which shone like gold on a bright, sunny day; but I had never thought of asking what it was—nor had I any no-

men that it was so near. Often, too, in the silence of the night, when cold and hunger kept me awake in that hideous den, had the deep but glorious sound of the mighty bell, booming through the air, and proclaiming the hour, fallen on my ears: but still I had never thought of inquiring which clock it was that struck so loud and was so tediously long in striking. Thus, when I entered Saint Paul's Churchyard for the first time, in company with Old Death, I was struck with amazement to find myself at the foot, as it were, of that tremendous giant of architecture. Just at that moment, too, the mighty bell began to strike six; and I started—for, young as I was, that well-known sound, though never heard so near before, re-awakened a thousand conflicting thoughts within me. All the misery and wretchedness I had endured at Mother Maggs's house rushed to my mind; and again I shed tears as I reflected on the poor children whom I had left behind me *there*!

"Oh! Mr. Rainford—if any kind and benevolent person had taken me then under his protection and care, and taught me to do good and practise virtue, as Old Death was teaching me to do evil and practise vice, I feel—yes, I feel that I should not have been unworthy such humane attention!"

"But let me not interrupt the thread of my narrative more than I can help. Mr. Bones kept me by the hand, and walked slowly—very slowly through the churchyard, pointing out to me the beautiful shops, and telling me that if I was a good boy and only did what he told me, I should soon be rich enough to be able to walk into those shops and treat myself to jewellery, or fine clothes, or anything else I might fancy. This assurance gave me the most heart-felt joy; and I already began to determine in my mind what I should buy when the happy period of such affluence might arrive. All on a sudden my gay reverie was interrupted by Old Death, who, dragging me hastily to the entrance of a passage leading into Paternoster Row, pointed to an elderly gentleman standing at a shop-window at the corner where this passage joined St. Paul's Churchyard. 'Do you see his handkerchief peeping out of his coat-pocket?' demanded Old Death hastily.—'Yes,' I replied.—'Then go and get it, and I will give you sixpence, if you bring it to me, without the old fellow perceiving that you have taken it.'—Sixpence! it was an inexhaustible treasure, such as I had often heard of, seldom seen, and never touched. Without a moment's hesitation I proceeded to execute the task. It was winter-time: and though the evening was dark, yet the shop-windows were brilliantly lighted. This was against me—but on the other hand, the place was crowded with people passing both ways, and this circumstance was in my favour. Old Death stood watching me at the entrance of the passage—no doubt ready to glide away in case of me being detected. But my skill in cribbing victuals and other little articles in Upper Whitecross Street had been so well practised, that it only required to apply the same art to another and rather more difficult branch of thieving, to be completely successful. And this success far exceeded Old Death's expectations; for when I returned to him in the passage, I was enabled to place in his hands not only the old gentleman's pocket-handkerchief, but also his gold snuff-box.

* You may suppose that Mr. Bones was well-

pleased with me; and he testified his approval of my conduct by placing a shilling in my hand. I could scarcely believe that I was indeed the possessor of such a sum; and I immediately made up my mind to ease as many old gentlemen as possible of their handkerchiefs and snuff-boxes, as long as a deed so simple was so generously rewarded.

"Old Death now conducted me to Drury Lane, and showing me a public-house, said, 'Jacob, though a young boy, you are a very good and clever boy, and I think I can trust you. If you assure me that you will do just as I tell you, I will give you a treat.'—I gave him the assurance he required.—'Well, then, walk boldly into that public-house; run up stairs, just as if you had been there a hundred times before; and go straight into the large concert-room that you will come to. You will have to pay a penny for going in. Then sit down at a table, call for bread and cheese and a glass of ale—of the nice ale that you like so much, you know; and enjoy yourself. You will find several other young lads there, who will no doubt speak to you; and you may talk to them as much as you like. I shall come into the room presently; but don't come near me; and do n't tell any one there that you know me. I have my reasons; and if you do all I tell you, you shall often have a treat to a concert and such like places. When you see me going away, you can follow me at a little distance. Now do you understand?'—I assured him that I did; and I then walked into the public-house as bold as if I had been a grown-up person and a constant customer. I had money in my pocket, and for the first time in my life felt that confidence which the possession of coin produces.

"The concert-room was speedily reached: my shilling was changed to pay the entrance fee; and I entered the place of amusement. It was—or had I not better say, it *is* a very large room; for it was at the *Mogul*, in Drury Lane, to which I had now introduced myself. The place was crowded; and the music and singing were going on. I was quite delighted, and, seating myself at a table near some other boys, all older than I was then, I told the waiter to bring me bread and cheese and a glass of ale. 'Better say a pint, old feller,' observed one of the boys to me: 'and I'll help you to drink it.'—I threw down the eleven-pence, saying, 'Bring bread and cheese and ale for all this.'—I remember that the waiter looked at me for a moment in a strange way, before he gathered up the money; but he said nothing, and hurried off. In a few minutes he returned with a pot of ale, bread and cheese, and several glasses. I was already on friendly terms with the boys at the same table; and we now got quite intimate over the ale. They soon let me know that they were all *prigs*; and I answered 'Yes' to every question they put to me about my own pursuits. Presently I saw Old Death walk slowly up the room: but I pretended to be looking quite another way.

"The conversation which I had on this occasion with the boys at the penny-concert, completed what was no doubt Old Death's design in sending me there: namely, to render me as familiar as possible with that class of lads at whose hands I was to receive my initiation into the career of roguery to which I was destined. The ale excited me to such a degree that I was even then ready to obey any one who would suggest a deed by which money could be

obtained; for I saw that money was the key to all kinds of enjoyment. Presently Old Death walked slowly out of the room; and two or three minutes afterwards I followed him, having told my new companions that I should be sure to meet them again there next night. In the street I joined Old Death, who asked me how I liked all I had seen? You can guess what my answer was. 'Well,' said he, 'it is for you to get a handkerchief and a snuff-box, or any thing of that kind, every day; and then you shall have money to go to concerts, and to buy nice ale, and to enjoy yourself along with those pleasant boys that you met there.'—I was delighted with this prospect; and I thought Old Death the kindest gentleman in the world, in spite of the box on the ears he had given me at the slopseller's shop in the morning. But all this time, remember, I did not know either his real or his nick-name; nor did I trouble myself about such matters.

"He now conducted me to Castle Street, Long Acre, and putting sixpence into my hand, pointed to a particular house. 'Go and knock at that door,' he said, 'and ask for a bed. You will have to pay two-pence for it. The four-pence left is to buy your breakfast in the morning, which the woman of the house will give you for that money. If the people you meet there ask you any questions, say as little as possible, and don't speak a word about me. If you do, I shall be sure to know it, and I will never see you again. Be a good boy; and at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, meet me at the corner of this street.'—I promised to mind all he told me; and he hurried away, while I gained admittance into one of those filthy lodging-houses that swarm in Castle Street.*

At this place, where I procured the half of a bed, my companion being a young girl of thirteen, who had already been a prostitute eighteen months, I received further lessons in the school of vice. In the morning I obtained a cup of coffee and a couple of rounds of thick bread-and-butter for my four-pence: having disposed of which, I hastened to my appointment with Old Death. He was waiting for me at the corner of the street, and asked me a great many questions about the people I had seen at the lodging-house. I satisfied him as far as I could; but, through some lingering feeling of shame, I did not tell him that a prostitute had been my bed-fellow. He desired me to follow him at a considerable distance, but to mind and not lose sight of him. He then led me for a long walk all about the West-end of London,—proceeding slowly, so that I might have an opportunity of looking at the shops and obtaining some knowledge of the position of the different streets: in a word, that I might be able to find my way about by myself another time. At about one o'clock we went into a public-house, where we had something to eat and drink, and rested for two or three hours. Then we set out on our wanderings again, and at about seven o'clock in the evening, we came to a halt in St. Giles's, where Old Death gave me money to enter a penny-theatre. I had not practised my hand at stealing any thing all day long; because he had not instructed me to do so. Neither, from that moment, did he ever put my abilities in that way to the test in his presence: so I suppose that the little affair in St. Paul's Churchyard was merely an experiment made to enable him to judge whether I had any *talent* in the art of *convoyancing*, or not. In fact, he had tried me to ascertain whether I could be made useful; and,

* Although our aim is to render the "History of Jacob Smith" a regular and connected narrative of the initiation of a neglected child in the ways of vice and the career of crime, there are necessarily many phases in the history of juvenile iniquity which cannot be introduced into the text, as it would be impossible that the boy who is telling his story could have gone through all the scenes alluded to. We must, therefore, farther illustrate our aim by means of a few notes, derived from authentic sources: and this course we are the more inclined to pursue, inasmuch as we hope that the episode formed by the "History of Jacob Smith" may have the effect of directing public attention more seriously than ever to the awful nature and extent of juvenile depravity in this metropolis. Mr. Miles, in his "Report to the House of Lords on Poverty, Mendicancy, and Crime," places on record the following observations:—

"The women and the girls in these districts live with their men as long as they can agree together, or until one or the other be imprisoned or transported. The very children are prostitutes, living with their "fancy lads;" and it is difficult to say which are the most degraded, the men or the women, the girls or the boys. It is thus that I suppose crime is more engendered in low neighbourhoods, where the poorest and the most idle congregate: and I now beg to continue my remarks upon the second head, namely, the neglect of parents. The various pursuits of these parents call them from home during the greater portion of the day, and their children are left to play and idle in the streets, associating with other lads of more experience than themselves, until, seeing and hearing how easy it is to steal, they commence their career of crime, unchecked on the one hand and applauded on the other. There are some parents who turn their children out every morning to provide for themselves, not caring by what means they procure a subsistence, so that

the expense of feeding them does not abstract from their means of procuring gin or beer. Other parents require their children to bring home a specified sum every night, to obtain which they must beg or thieve. Others hire out their children to beggars, for 3d. a day (a cripple is considered worth 6d.); and many women hire children in arms about the same age, to pass them off in the public thoroughfares as twins. Groups of these young neglected vagabonds herd together, and theft becomes their study; even if a child was well disposed, it is not probable that he could escape the contagion of such bad example. There is a *community of children*, who live and are separated from persons more advanced in years. Moreover, there is so rapid and so certain a communication among them all over the metropolis, that if they discover any of their slang or flash words to be known out of their circle, they will substitute another, which in the course of a day or two will be adopted by the fraternity. There are lodging-houses exclusively for their accommodation, public-houses which are chiefly supported by their custom, and the landlords of both sorts of establishments are ever ready to purchase any plunder they may bring. With this neglect of parents on the one hand, and the facilities to crime on the other hand, can it be expected that these children can resist temptation? The wonder would be if a boy was honest. My conclusion, therefore, is, that the neglect of parents in these low neighbourhoods renders them *nurseries of crime*. The number of boys in London who live by plunder is very—very considerable: and thus society is maintaining them at a great expense, either in the shape of prison expenses, or by the value of the property they steal, especially when it is considered that the receivers never give one quarter the value: and there is not a boy thief who, on the average, does not expend 5s. per diem."



finding that I could, his object was now to introduce me to scenes and places where my morals might become confirmed in iniquity, or where there was a sphere for the exercise of my abilities.

"I need not therefore dwell on this part of my story; for in a few days the use which Old Death calculated to make of me was fully explained. I was to thieve where I could and when I could, and every evening I was to meet my employer at some place that he would appoint, and hand him over the articles so stolen; when he was to give me enough money for the following day's expenses. I was, moreover, charged to enlist in the same service as many boys as I could; and now for the first time I learnt that my hitherto unknown protector was named Mr. Benjamin Bones, and my companions soon informed me that he was a famous *fence*, usually bearing the denomination of 'Old Death.' I must not forget to state that my employer counselled me never to allude to him in any manner, unless it was in the way of enlistment, as just now mentioned. He said, 'It will perhaps happen, Jacob, that a constable or a Bow Street runner may catch hold of you sometimes; but do not breathe a word about me,

and I will always get you out of the scrape. If, on the other hand, you confess that you are employed by me, or that you are in my service, it will do you no good, and I shall cast you off for ever. Indeed, I should leave you to rot in prison; whereas, hold your tongue, whatever may happen, and you will find me your best friend.'

"I promised to obey him; and now, behold me at the tender age of nine, the companion of the worst juvenile pickpockets, and a pickpocket myself! No link had we to bind us to society: the world was our harvest-field, in which we considered that we had a right to glean; and whenever a member of our fraternity got 'into trouble,' we clubbed together to maintain him well in prison. If he was condemned to punishment, he and ourselves looked upon it as a piece of *bad luck*—and that was all. I found that my companions were as reckless and unprovided as could be, ever fulfilling the old adage, '*Light come, light go.*' They used to play at 'pitch and toss,' or skittles, the stakes varying, according to their means at the moment, from a halfpenny to a sovereign. I was not often enabled to join in these sports; because Old Death kept me

rather short, and he had obtained such an astonishing influence over me that I dared not attempt to deceive him. Sometimes I thought of appropriating a portion of a 'day's work' to my own private use; but his image haunted me like a ghost—and I could not do it. He constantly told me that he had the means of ascertaining every robbery that was committed, and who perpetrated it, and that if I attempted to play him any tricks, I should be sure to be found out. I believed him—for he occasionally gave me proofs of the most extraordinary knowledge of all that was passing. He would say, for instance, 'Your friend Such-a-one filched a snuff-box and a pocket-book yesterday in Regent Street: he gave his employer the book, and pawned the box on his own account. Now, mark me, Old Death would add, 'that boy will get into trouble soon, and no one will help him out of it again.'—And this prophecy would come true. I was therefore alarmed at the mere idea of deceiving Old Death—or rather, attempting to deceive him; and, though my companions often jeered me and urged me to 'set up on my own account,' I lacked the moral courage to break with Mr Benjamin Bones.

"I was very expert in the art of pickpocketing, and seldom had to disappoint Old Death when I met him in the evening. If I did, he gave me my money all the same: I suppose I was too useful to him to be lost; and perhaps he knew that I always did my best. He allowed me three shillings and sixpence for each day's expenses; and this money was usually laid out in the way I will now explain:—

Breakfast.—Pint of coffee, 2d.; loaf of bread, 2d.; butter, 1d.	0s. 5d.
Dinner.—Beef, 3d.; potatoes, 1d.; bread, 1d.; beer, 2d.	0 7
Tea.—Half-pint tea, 1½; toast, 3d.	0 4½
Supper.—Leg of beef, 3d.; bread, 1d.; potatoes, 1d.; beer, 2d.	0 7
Gin and water, 1s.; bed, 4d.	1 4
	3 3½

—leaving me 2½d. a day for any casual expense. This allowance of 3s. 6d. may perhaps seem rather liberal; but it was seldom that my earnings during the day were not of sufficient value to produce Old Death at least fifteen or twenty shillings—and often a great deal more.

"There are various grades, or classes, of juvenile thieves.* The most aristocratic amongst them are

* In the First Series of the "MYSTERIES OF LONDON," Vol. II. ch. CXIII., there is a detailed account of an association denominated "The Forty Thieves." Soon after the Weekly Number containing that chapter appeared, we were inundated with letters, chiefly expressing unqualified disbelief of the astonishing particulars recorded in respect to the Forty Thieves. We answered all those which contained the real names and addresses of the writers, assuring them that the details related were strictly true, and that we actually possessed a printed copy of the regulations by which the Forty Thieves were governed. Still, most of our correspondents were sceptical. It was therefore with a feeling almost bordering on satisfaction that we saw in the *Morning Chronicle*, a few weeks ago, a report of a police-case in which the prisoner who figured before the magistrate was described as "belonging to an association denominated the 'Forty Thieves,' and whose head-quarters were in the Mint, Southwark." We take this opportunity of assuring our readers that of what they find recorded in the "MYSTERIES OF LONDON," far—far more is based on fact than they might at first suspect.

those who have been admitted into the fraternity of swell-mobbates, or who have taken a hand in house-breaking. The next class, on the descending scale, is the pickpocket who dives only for purses, watches, pocket-books, or snuff-boxes, but who would scorn to touch a handkerchief. The third section consists of those who dive for any thing they can get, and whose chief game *does* consist of handkerchiefs. The fourth division comprises shop-sneaks and area-sneaks: the former enter a shop slyly, or crawl in on their hands and knees, to rob the tills; the latter get down area-steps and enter kitchens, whence they walk off with any thing they can lay their hands on. This same section also includes the shop-bouncer, who boldly enters a shop, and, while affecting to bargain for goods, purloins some article easily abstracted. The fifth division is made up of thieves who prowl about shop-doors; or who break the glass in shop-windows, to abstract the goods; or who rob merecs by introducing a bent wire through the holes of the shutter-bolts and draw out lace, silk, or ribands. The sixth, and last division or grade, consists of the very lowest description of thieves—such as pudding-snamers, who loiter about cooks'-shops, and when customers are issuing forth with plates of meat and pudding, or pudding alone (as is often the case), pounce on the eatables and run away with them before the persons robbed have even time to recover from their astonishment. These miserable thieves sell all they cannot eat, to other boys, and thus manage to get a few halfpence to pay for a lodging. I mention all those circumstances to you, sir, because I do not believe that you can have ever found yourself in a position to have seen what I am now relating.*

"On one occasion a certain robbery in which I was concerned, made some noise; and the Bow Street runners got a pretty accurate description of me. This I learnt from Old Death, who advised me to go up into the Holy Land—which I need scarcely tell you is St. Giles's—and remain quiet there for a few days until the thing was pretty well blown over. I followed this advice, which was very welcome to me; because Mr. Bones gave me plenty of money to make myself comfortable, and I was

* Mr. Miles, in his Report (from which we have previously quoted) says, "In considering the subject of juvenile delinquency, it is requisite to take into account the various causes which compel them to be vicious; and though we must condemn, still we must regret that no efficient means have been adopted to prevent this lamentable evil. Young thieves have often confessed to me, that their first attempts at stealing commenced at apple stalls, and that having acquired confidence by a few successful adventures, they have gradually progressed in crime, allured by others, and in their turn alluring. They find companions to cheer them and instruct them, gulls to share their booty and applaud them, and every facility to sell their daily booty. There is, moreover, a kind of lottery adventure in each day's life; and as these excitements are attainable at so easy a rate, is it strange that these children are fascinated with and abandon themselves to crime? Imprisonment to a young urchin who steals and has no other means of subsistence is no punishment; for it is indifferent to him where he exists, so long as he has food and raiment. It is in prison that boys form acquaintances, more mischievous than themselves. Many lads have owned to me that they had learned more in a gaol than out of one. I once asked a lad if there was any school where boys were taught to pick pockets? Upon which he significantly observed, 'No occasion for one, sir: the best school for that sort of thing is here!' alluding to the prison in which I saw him."

not expected to do any 'work' for at least a week. I happened to take up my quarters at a lodging-house in Lawrence Lane, and found it chiefly used by the very lowest Irish. Never did I see such a set as they were! Filth, misery, and drunkenness were familiar enough to me; heaven knows!—but there I saw such filth, so much misery, and yet such constant and such horrible drunkenness, that I was perfectly shocked—and it required something strong to shock me, Mr. Rainford! The house was a brothel; and the daughters of the man who kept it were their own father's best customers. The most dreadful debauchery prevailed there. Old women used to bring young boys, and old men young girls—mere children,—to that beastly stew. I have seen a dozen men and women all dancing together stark naked in the largest room in that house; and some of their brothers and sisters! On another occasion I saw an Irish wake in the same place: the corpse, which was that of a prostitute, was laid upon the floor, with candles placed round it: and the friends and relatives of the deceased woman all got so awfully drunk that they commenced a dreadful battle, tumbling about in all directions over the dead body!

"I stayed at this lodging-house in St. Giles's about a week, and never went out except of an evening for about an hour, when I looked in at Milberry's—the flash public-house in Lawrence Lane. Were you ever there, sir? No. Well—it is worth your while just to give a look in any time you are passing. The public room is fitted up with fine tables and high-back partitions. Fronting the door is a large black board, whereon the following inscription may be read:—

My pipe I can't afford to give,
If by my trade I wish to live;
My liquor's proof, my measure's just
Excuse me, sir, I cannot trust."

'To prevent MISTAKES all liquors to be paid for on delivery!

"As soon as the little affair which had driven me up into St. Giles's, was blown over, I returned to my old haunts, and fell in again with my old companions. I was now ten years old, and was considered so cunning and clever that Old Death began to employ me in other ways besides thieving. If he required to know any thing concerning a particular party, he would set me to dog and watch him, or to make inquiries about him. Sometimes I was sent to the flash public-houses frequented by gentlemen's servants who were accustomed to arrange with the cracksmen for burglaries in their master's houses—or 'put up cracks,' as they are called. These public-houses are principally at the West End:—the most famous are in Duke Street (Manchester Square), and Portland Street. There I got into conversation with the servants, or merely acted the part of a listener; and all the information I could glean was of course conveyed to Mr. Bones, who no doubt knew how to turn it to his greatest advantage.

"I was also a visitor to every flash-house in London, at different times, and on various errands for

* We cannot allow the readers to attribute to our imagination a fact so disgusting as this. We received the information from a police-officer who was an eye-witness of such a scene, and from whom (as stated in a previous note in this Series) we have gleaned many remarkable facts relative to the lowest orders.

Old Death. The more his business increased, the more necessary did I become to him; and at that period he was not so near and stingy as he since became. Whenever I succeeded in any difficult undertaking, he would reward me with something like liberality; and I do not know whether I actually liked him—but it is certain that he exercised an immense power over my mind. I was, in my turn, much looked up to by my companions: they considered me Old Death's lieutenant; and moreover I was so skilful as a pickpocket, that no one could excel, and few equal me. I had all the qualifications necessary for the art—a light tread, a delicate sense of touch, and firm nerves. For I was then strong and healthy: now I am sickly—wasted—and have within me the seeds of an incurable malady! I used at that time to wear shoes of a very light make—as indeed do nearly all professional pickpockets. It is very easy for one who is any thing of an acute observer, to recognise juvenile pickpockets in the street. Their countenances wear an affected determination of purpose, and they always seem to be walking forward, as if bent on some urgent object of business. They never stop in the street, save to 'work.' If they wish to confer with their pals, or if they meet a friend, they dive into some low public-house, or court, or alley. A knowing pickpocket never loiters about in the street; because that is the very first thing that draws suspicious glances towards lads. I have read—and how I came to be able to read, I shall presently tell you)—in the newspapers that many people have a notion that pickpockets use instruments in easing gentlemen or ladies of their purses or other articles of value: but the only instrument I ever knew a pickpocket to use, or used myself, is a good pair of small scissors, which will either rip a pocket up or cut it off in a twinkling.

"I do believe that London thieves* are the very

* Mr. Miles's Report says, "London thieves have no sense of moral degradation; they are corrupt to the core; they are strangers to virtue and character, even by name; for many of them are the children of thieves or of exceedingly dissolute people, consequently they can have no contrition; they are in a state of predatory existence, without any knowledge of social duty; they may lament detection, because it is an inconvenience, but they will not repent their crime; in gaol they will ponder on the past, curse their 'evil stars,' and look forward with anxiety to the moment of their release; but their minds and habits are not constituted for repentance. Mr. Chesterton, of the House of Correction, informed me that he considers reformation among juvenile offenders to be utterly hopeless; he observed, that 'boys brought up in a low neighbourhood have no chance of being honest, because on leaving a gaol they return to their old haunts, and follow the example of their parents or associates.' Lieutenant Tracy, of the Westminster Bridewell, has pointed out to me lads who live constantly in gaols.

"Captain Kincaid, of the City Bridewell, informed me that one-half of the number under his lock on the day that I inspected the prison (June the 9th) had been more than once committed, many of them several times, especially the boys. Mr. Teague, of the Giltspur-street Compter, is of opinion that young thieves are mostly incorrigible—that nothing will reform them; an opinion which, he says, he has formed from the experience of many years. Mr. Capper, of the Home Office, stated, in his evidence, that out of 300 juvenile convicts, on board the hulk *Euryalus*, the eldest of whom was not 17, 133 had been committed more than once; and an experienced burglar told me that young thieves cannot and will not reform. 'The only thing, sir,' he remarked, 'that may save them is transportation, as it removes them from evil companions.'

"The young thief is a nucleus of mischief. A young pick-

worst in the whole world. Their prodigality commences so early; and there is every thing to harden them. Imprisonment raises them into heroes amongst their companions. Only fancy a boy of twelve or thirteen, perhaps,—or even younger,—placed behind huge massive bars which ten elephants could not pull down! He of course thinks that he must be a very clever fellow, or at least a very important one, that the law is compelled to adopt such wonderful precautions to restrain him. He believes that society must entertain a marvellous dread of his abilities. That boy, too, is the superior in the eyes of the whole fraternity of thieves, whose punishment is the heaviest. A lad who has been tried at the Old Bailey, thinks much more of himself than one who has only passed through the ordeal of the sessions. The very pomp of justice,—the idea that all those judges and barristers in their gowns and wigs should be assembled for the sake of a boy,—that the Old Bailey street should be crowded with policemen,—that newspaper reporters should be anxious to take notes,—that spectators should pay shillings to obtain sittings in the court,—in a word, the whole ceremony and circumstance of the criminal tribunals actually tend to imbue juvenile thieves with a feeling of self-importance. Now, might not this very feeling be acted upon to a good and beneficial purpose,—to the advancement of industry and honest emulation? I think so; but society never seems to adopt really useful measures to *reform*—it contents itself with *punishing*. You may be surprised to hear such reflections come from my lips: but who is better able to judge than one who has passed through the entire ordeal?"

Here Jacob paused, and then inquired if he were wearying Tom Rain with his narrative.

pocket, named Stuart, aged 13, informed me that his parents daily sent him into the streets to 'look about,' that is, to plunder whatever he could lay his hands upon; that his principal associates were three young thieves with whom he 'worked,' or robbed; that when he was 10 years old he stood at a horse's head while his companion stole a great coat from the gig; that he got sixpence for his share of the plunder, that he had committed many robberies because he was made to do it; and that he lived entirely by plunder. Mr Chesterton states, in his evidence before the select committee of the House of Commons in answer to query 474, 'Some of the parents lead their children into evil courses. It is no uncommon thing, when we are listening to the conversation between the prisoners and their parents, to hear a conversation that shows at once the boy's situation; but the old thieves are in the habit of bringing in with them young inexperienced lads. Whenever the elder thieves are recommitted, they are frequently recommitted with another.' He also observes (522) that 'the elder thieves are continually corrupting young lads, and bringing them into prison.'

"I am informed that Captain Brenton considers the total number of juvenile offenders within the bills of mortality to be 12,000. Dr. Lushington, I believe, computed the number still higher; and from the evidence above quoted it is evident that each elder offender is daily spreading the mischief far and wide.

"There is a youthful population in the metropolis devoted to crime, trained to it from infancy, adhering to it from education and circumstances, whose connections prevent the possibility of reformation, and whom no punishment can deter; a race '*sui generis*,' different from the rest of society, not only in thoughts, habits, and manners, but even in appearance; possessing, moreover, a language exclusively their own. There are lodging-houses kept by old thieves where juvenile offenders herd together, and their constant intercourse tends to complete corruption. It is in these hotbeds of vice that they revel in the fruits of their plunder; and though extremely young, they live with girls, indulging in every kind of debauchery."

"So far from your doing so, my good fellow," replied the highwayman, "that although I have several things to attend to, I mean to stop and hear you to the end. Come, drink a glass of wine. There! now you will be the better able to proceed. I will light another cigar—for I fancy that I can attend more earnestly while smoking."

Rainford once more settled himself in a comfortable posture; and the lad pursued his narrative in the following manner.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONTINUATION OF THE HISTORY OF JACOB SMITH.

"I NOW come to an important event in my life—in fact, that portion of it which will account for this sickly condition of health in which you see me. Old Death one evening took me with him to supper at a place where he had never introduced me before. This was Bunce's in Earl Street, Seven Dials. Mrs. Bunce immediately seemed to take a great fancy to me—made me sit next to her—and, in spite of her meanness, helped me to the best of every thing on table. It was a very good supper; for Old Death, who provided it, had declared that he meant to launch out for once. But I suppose it was only to put me into such a good humour that I was the more likely to fall into the scheme which he had in view. This was not, however, the reason of Mrs. Bunce's kindness; because since then she has often treated me in a manner that has made me forget many a sorrow. It is true that these likings only take her by fits and starts—and she has not unfrequently used me cruelly enough. I can scarcely make that woman out, as far as I am concerned; and there are moments when I think a great deal of any kind words she has ever uttered to me, or any kind treatment she has ever shown me.

"But I am wandering from the subject which I had entered upon. You remember that I was telling you about the supper at Bunce's house. Well, after the things were cleared away, and the grog was going round pretty fast,—I used to drink then as much as a man, although little more than ten years old;—Old Death began to talk a great deal about the money that might be made by a clever lad like me being able to get admittance into the houses of rich people. He went on to say that I should begin to think of doing business that would leave me more time to amuse myself, and be also less dangerous than going about the streets picking pockets. I assured him that I was heartily sick and tired of the life I was leading, and that I wished I was old enough to be a housebreaker. 'For,' said I, 'a cracksmen does have some time which he can call his own. If he does only one job a week, he is satisfied; but I am obliged to gad about all day to get the means of living on the next. Besides,' said I, 'I am of course running a thousand times more risks by doing so many jobs each day, than I should if I only did one or two a week.'*—'Everybody

* Every juvenile delinquent is as anxious to rise in his "profession" as the military or naval officer, or the member of any other hierarchy. But with the votaries of crime the apex of promotion is—the gibbet! Mr. Miles says, 'I have questioned many boys of shrewd understanding concerning their opinions, and the opinions of their associates, as to their ultimate fate (for all thieves are fatalists). They look upon

must have his apprenticeship,' returned Old Death 'and you have now served yours. I agree with you that it is high time for you to be doing something better; and I have a plan ready chalked out for you.'—Mrs. Bunce mixed me another glass of grog: I produced my short pipe, and blew a cloud while Old Death explained his scheme. At first I did not much relish it: but he backed it with so many arguments, that I agreed to try it.

"And, sure enough, at six o'clock one morning—a few days afterwards—a boy, black as a devil, with soot-bag over his shoulder, and brush and scraper in his hand, was making the round of Bloomsbury Square, bawling, 'Sweep!' as lustily as he could. That boy was myself. Presently a garret-window opened, and a female voice called me to stop. I obeyed. In a few minutes down came the cook to the front door, and I was desired to walk in and operate on the kitchen-chimney. The cook was a fat, middle-aged, good-natured body, and asked me a great many questions about myself,—how long I had been a sweep—how it happened that I became one—whether I had any father or mother—and a host of such queries; to all of which I replied in the most sorrowful manner possible. I assured her that I had been a sweep from infancy—that I had swept a chimney when I was only five years old—that I had no parents—that my master beat me cruelly—and that I had had nothing to eat since the morning before. The good creature shed tears at my narrative; and, when I had swept the chimney—which I did in a manner that scarcely bore out

their inevitable doom to be either sooner or later transportation or the diop! It is difficult to imagine a state of more gloomy wretchedness and desparingly horrible than the self-conviction of convicts, punishment, without one gleam of hope to clear the melancholy perspective. Punishments and whippings are therefore useless, for the mind is prepared to endure more, and every imprisonment is only looked upon as another step in the ladder of their sad destiny. The lad is hopeless, consequently reckless in his conduct,—hardened to the present, and irreclaimable as to the future. It is not by prison discipline that reformation can be effected: the temptations, the facilities, and the love of idleness are too alluring. Crowds of young thieves will wait round a prison-gate, to fill a companion on the morning of his liberation, and to carry him off to treat him and regale him for the day. I have asked boys under sentence of transportation if they thought they could reform, if returned again upon society, and the general reply has been, 'No.' Their reasons for that conclusion I give in their own words:—'If we were to be free to-morrow, we must go to our old haunts and our old companions, for where else can we go? If we try to be honest we cannot, for our 'pals' (associates) would torment us to return; in short, we should only have to come back here at last, but we are now going to another country, where we hope to be honest men.'

"I have, moreover, questioned many lads as to what method they would adopt to prevent other boys from falling into crime, and then remarks have been, 'Stop playing in the streets, for a pocket is soon picked, and there are many who show others how to do it,—and the next thing is to stop those cursed receivers; for if a receiver knows a boy to have dealt with him, (that is, to have sold him property,) he will make him go out to thieve; he will never let him rest, and even should we get into employment, he will tease us till he makes us rob the master, or will tell of us to the police.' These remarks prove the boys to be good judges of their own cases; so, like a skilful physician, they know where to apply the remedy; and as I feel convinced that many of these urchins possess every requisite to be good and useful members of society, so am I certain that their reformation, in a majority of cases, is as practicable, under proper means, as their ultimate ruin is now certain, under the present system."

the assertion of my long experience—she gave me a quantity of broken victuals in addition to the money earned. I then took my departure, having very quietly deposited half-a-dozen silver forks and spoons in my soot-bag, while her back was turned.

"This business I carried on successfully enough for some months; till at last Old Death told me that he had seen several paragraphs in the papers, warning people against thefts committed by sweeps. I therefore gave up the employment, and once more took refuge in St. Giles's. But my health was seriously injured by the occupation I had just renounced; and from that time I have always been ailing and sickly. Although I had seldom turned sweep more than twice a week, and an hour after each robbery that I thus committed was as clean again as if I had never been near a chimney in my life,—yet the seeds of disease were planted in me, and I feel the effects here—here—in my chest!

"The life that I led when I gave up the chimney-sweep business, did not certainly tend to improve my health. I hired a room in St. Giles's, and took a girl into keeping—I being then eleven, and she thirteen. Of all profligate creatures, Peggy Wilkins was the worst. The moment she awoke in the morning, she must have her half-quarter of gin; and then she would go on drinking at short intervals all day long. If I attempted to stop the supplies, she would fly into the most dreadful passions, break every thing she could lay her hands on, or else throw the domestic articles at my head. When tipsy, she would loll half naked out of the window, and chaff the people passing in the street. In the evening she went to the penny concerts or penny theatres,* and generally came home so gloriously

* Mr. Brandon, in his Preface to Mr. Miles's Report, makes the following observations, which are too important to need any apology for their quotation:—

"If a religious fanatic brings a Bill into the House for the 'better observance of the Sabbath,' whose comforts are to be abridged? Why, the poor man's and those of the middling classes; for it is the stage-coaches and omnibuses that are to be prohibited from making their appearance, while the streets may be thronged with carriages; and though the labourer is not permitted to purchase his necessary food on that sacred day, unable to have accomplished it before from not having received his wages till too late the preceding night, yet the fishmonger may keep the turbot cool that is to grace his lordship's Sunday table, and send it home on the very day, just in time to be prepared for dinner.

"Penny theatres, too, are decreed and suppressed, while the larger ones are permitted—the reason assigned being that the company who frequent the former render the step necessary, but the delinquency does not arise from cheap exhibitions—it is from the inefficiency of the law to restrain the audience; for in the plays themselves there is no improper language used. Holland, a notorious thief, in his examination, said he had heard bad language at those places before the curtain drew up, but never any thing indecent on the stage. This is a damning proof where the fault lies; if the laws were such as to restrain vice, and those properly administered, it would effectually prevent the improper conduct of the loose individuals, and preclude the necessity of reducing the pleasures of the poor; pockets are picked every night at the royal theatres, and scenes of the worst description carried on in the lobbies; yet it never entered into the cranium of the wisacres that if the theatres were shut up, these abominations would be effectually eradicated. It is highly gratifying to witness the order and pleasure with which cheap diversions are conducted on the continent, even so close to us as Boulogne and Calais, where may be seen the lowest classes enjoying themselves in dancing and visiting the various public gardens, the entrance to which is a fee equivalent to our penny. Another proof of the difference with which our laws

drunk that the entire house, much less our little room, would scarcely hold her. You may wonder why I continued to live with her: but the fact is, I liked her in spite of her outrageous conduct, and as I was sometimes very dull and low, her noisy, racketty disposition positively helped to put me into good spirits. She knew nothing of my connexion with Old Death; but she was aware that I was laying hid in St. Giles's in consequence of having robbed houses disguised as a sweep; and she used to laugh heartily when I told her several amusing anecdotes relative to that portion of my career.

"One night—after having lived about a month in idleness in the Holy Land—I was compelled by the falling short of supplies, to call at Bunce's in Seven Dials, for the purpose of seeing Old Death. After waiting there a short time, he came in; and I immediately noticed that his face was more serious than usual,—a certain sign that he had something new on hand. I did not, however, venture to ask any questions; for I still stood in the greatest awe of him, and knew that his disposition was irritable and easy to be provoked. At length he said to Mrs. Bunce, 'Give that lad a good strong glass of grog: he's shivering with cold.'—I was not, but I took the grog, because I never refused spirits at that time. When Old Death thought I was primed enough to embrace any new plan with eagerness, he said, 'Jacob, I have something for you to do that I am convinced will yield a good harvest.'—I instantly became all attention.—'There's a widow lady,' he continued, 'living at the West End, in a swell street; and, by all I can learn, she is very well off. She is also very charitable, and belongs to a number of what's called Religious Societies; and I am sure you could get into her house as easy as possible. The chimney-sweep business has well-nigh blown over, if not quite; and it's high time to begin a new dodge.'—He then explained his plan; and I agreed to adopt it.

"When I got back to my lodging in St. Giles's, I found Peggy sitting in company with a young fellow of about fifteen, drinking raw spirits. She had not expected me home so early, and was for a moment quite taken aback. But soon recovering herself, she put a good face on the matter, and introduced the young chap as her brother; saying that she had not seen him for many years before that evening, when she had met him by accident. I pretended to believe her; but the moment he was gone, I gave her a good beating and overwhelmed her with reproaches. She showed less spirit than I had expected, and did not attempt to return the blows; neither did she treat me with sulkiness or ill-humour.

"On the following evening, at about nine o'clock, I very quietly laid myself down on the door-steps of a house in Old Burlington Street. I was in such rags and tatters as to be almost naked; and having pricked my feet, with a pointed bit of wood, in several places, they were almost covered with blood, as if chapped with the cold and cut by the sharp stones. This was in the depth of winter; and my appearance was most miserable. Presently a carriage drove up to the house, and a fine, tall, elderly gen-

tleman got out. I was crouched up close by the threshold of the door, and I purposely let him tread on one of my naked feet. Then I began to sob as if with pain; and he now observed me for the first time. He muttered an oath; but at that instant the front-door opened, and his manner changed directly. He spoke kindly to me, and put half-a-crown into my hand. A lady was crossing the hall while the door stood open and this gentleman was still speaking to me; and she immediately turned to ascertain what was the matter. 'Here's a poor, wretched creature,' said the gentleman, 'who was so huddled up against the door, that I did not observe him; and I am afraid I trod on his leg somewhat heavily.'—The lady instantly spoke in the most compassionate terms, and desired that I might be brought into the house. The man-servant raised me, for I affected to be unable to walk; and the lady said, 'Poor boy, he is paralysed with the cold!'—When I was moved into the hall, and placed in a chair, the state of my feet was observed; and this increased the compassion I had already excited. She ordered the servant to take me into the kitchen, and give me a good supper, while I warmed myself by the fire.

"All these commands were immediately executed; shoes and stockings were also supplied me; and in the course of an hour the lady herself came down to speak to me. She asked me who I was. I told her a long and piteous tale, already prepared for the occasion,—how I had been apprenticed to a tradesman at Liverpool, and had undergone the most dreadful treatment because I refused to work on the Lord's Day and insisted on my right to go to church; how the cruelty of my master had increased to such an extent, that I was obliged to run away; how I had wandered about the country for the last two months, subsisting on charity, but often half-starved; how I had that morning found my way to London, and had been obliged to sell my shoes for a penny to buy a roll, which was all I had eaten during thirty-six hours: but that I had an aunt who was housekeeper to a certain Bishop, and that I knew she would do all she could for me. The lady seemed to eye me suspiciously until I spoke of the aunt and the Bishop; and then her countenance instantly changed in my favour. 'Well, my poor lad,' she said, 'you shall remain here to-night; and the first thing to-morrow morning, one of my servants shall take a message from you to your aunt.'—I of course expressed my gratitude for this kindness; but the lady assured me that she required no thanks, as heaven rewarded her for what she did towards her suffering fellow-creatures. I really thought that there was something very much like what I and my usual associates were accustomed to call '*gammon*' in all this; and then I actually reproached myself for the idea, and began to repent of imposing on so much virtue and goodness.

"When I was well warmed with the cheerful fire and plentiful supper, the housekeeper of this lady conducted me to a little room on the top storey, and having wished me a 'good night,' retired, locking the door behind her. But this did not give me much uneasiness; for beneath my rags I had concealed the necessary means to counteract such a precaution. Accordingly, about an hour after I had heard the servants withdraw to their bed-rooms, which were on the same floor as the one where I

are administered according to the parties affected, is manifest in the proceedings against the various houses for play in the metropolis, the clubs of the aristocracy and the 'little goes, little hells, &c. of the poor.'

was placed,—and when I thought the house was all quiet,—I took off the lock of the door by means of a little turn-screw, and crept carefully down stairs. Just at that minute the clock struck eleven. My intention was to visit the drawing-room first; but when I reached the door, I perceived there were lights within. I listened, and heard the gentleman and lady talking together. ‘Oh! ho,’ thought I, ‘I shall have time to inspect the lady’s bed-room first, and perhaps secure her jewels.’—So, naturally conceiving that this chamber must be the one immediately over the drawing-room, I retraced my way up stairs, and entered the front apartment on the second floor. A rush-light was burning in the room; but no one was there. I lost no time in commencing my search in all the cupboards; but I found nothing except clothes. There was, however, a mahogany press which was fast locked. I drew forth a small skeleton key, and was about to use it, when I was alarmed by footsteps in the passage. In another moment I was safely concealed under the bed.

“Some one almost immediately afterwards entered the room, and only closed the door without shutting it. I dared not move even to peep from beneath the drapery that hung round the bed to the floor; but I could tell by the rustling of silk and the unlacing of stays, that the person in the room was undressing herself—and I felt satisfied it was the lady of the house. I was now seriously alarmed. She was evidently going to bed; and my only chance of escaping from the chamber was when she should be asleep. But might I not disturb her? My situation was very unpleasant—and a prison seemed to open before my eyes.

“In about a quarter of an hour the lady stepped into bed. How I longed to catch the first sound that should convince me she was asleep! But she was not dreaming of closing her eyes yet awhile; for scarcely had she laid herself down, when the door was gently opened—then carefully closed again—and another person, evidently without shoes or boots on, came into the room. They said a few words to each other; and to my astonishment I found that the gentleman who had arrived in his carriage (which of course had been sent away) was going to pass an hour in company with the charitable lady. ‘Well,’ thought I, ‘this is the way in which heaven rewards her for all she does towards her suffering fellow-creatures!’

“The gentleman undressed himself, and got into bed. Nearly two hours, instead of an hour, passed away—very pleasantly, it seemed, for the lady and gentleman, and very much to my amusement. I was now no longer under any alarm on account of myself—for I had learnt a secret which placed the lady in my power. Well, the gentleman got up at last and dressed himself; and the lady went down stairs with him to bolt the street-door after him. Their movements were so cautious, that I could plainly perceive the servants must have fancied that the gentleman had gone away long before, and that this care was taken to avoid disturbing them with any noise likely to excite suspicion.

“The moment the lady had left the room with her lover, I thought of beating a retreat. But should I go empty-handed? No: and yet I had not time to force open the mahogany press, which I believed must contain her jewels, before she would come back, as she had gone down in her night-clothes. I

therefore resolved to stay where I was, and accomplish my purpose when she was asleep; because if matters did come to the worst and she should awake, she dared not expose me. So I laid quiet; and she came back in a few minutes, shivering with the cold—for I could hear her teeth actually chatter. Half an hour afterwards she was fast asleep—as I could tell by her deep and regular breathing. The rush-light still burnt in the room; and I crept carefully from beneath the bed. Yes—she was sleeping; and, though not a young woman, she appeared very beautiful. But I had not a minute to lose: my skeleton key was again at work—the bolt of the lock flew back—and the door of the press moved on its hinges. Move! yes—and creak, too, most awfully; so that the lady started up in bed, and uttered a faint-scream. I instantly rushed up to her, saying in a low but determined tone, ‘Madam, not a word—or I betray you and your lover!’—By the feeble light of the candle, I saw that she became as red as crimson.—‘Yes, madam,’ I continued, ‘your ticks are known to me; and I have been all the while concealed under this bed.’—‘You!’ she exclaimed: ‘why, surely you are the poor boy that I received into the house this evening?’—‘To be sure I am, ma’am,’ was my answer; ‘and, being troubled with a habit of sleep-walking, I found my way to this room.’—‘But what were you doing at the bureau?’—‘Merely examining it in my sleep, ma’am.’—‘This is ridiculous,’ she said impatiently. ‘I understand what you are; but I will treat you well on condition that you do not mention to a soul what you have been a witness of this night.’—‘I have no interest in gossiping, ma’am.’—‘And were you to do so, I can deny all you may state,’ added the lady, who was dreadfully excited and nervous, as you may suppose. ‘But if you follow my directions, I will reward you well.’—I readily gave a promise to that effect. She then took a reticule from a chair by the side of the bed, and drawing out her purse, emptied its contents into my hands. At a rapid glance I saw there could not be less than fifteen or sixteen sovereigns, besides a little silver. She then took from her bag a Bank-note for twenty pounds, which she also gave me.

“I secured the money about my person, and she asked me whether I was satisfied? I said, ‘Perfectly.’—Then stand aside for a few moments, and I will show you how to act.’—I stepped behind the curtain, while she rose and put on a dressing-gown; having done which, she took the rush-light in her hand and desired me to follow her as noiseless as possible. We went down into the kitchen, where she told me to take all the cold victuals there were in the larder; and she gave me a napkin to wrap them up in. There happened to be a silver spoon in one of the dishes—left there most probably by accident. This she also desired me to take; and you may be sure I did not refuse. These arrangements being made, she led me to the front door, and having reminded me of my promise not to talk about a certain affair, let me out of the house. I have no doubt that there was a great deal said next morning in Old Burlington Street, about the ungrateful lad who was taken in as an object of charity, and who decamped in the middle of the night with the contents of the larder and a silver spoon into the bargain.”

“But you have not mentioned the name of this lady, Jacob?” interrupted Tom Rain.

"I did not think it was worth while, sir—as she used me very well——"

"Still I have a very particular reason for wishing to be informed on that head," said the highwayman.

"Oh! if that's the case, I shall not hesitate," replied Jacob. "The name of that lady was Mrs. Slingsby."

"I thought so from the very first moment you began to speak of her!" cried Tom. "And the name of the gentleman—did you learn that?"

"Yes, sir," answered the lad: "I heard the servants talking about him, when I was in the kitchen. His name was—let me see?—Oh! yes—I remember—Sir Henry Courtenay."

"Thank you, Jacob," exclaimed Tom: then, in a low, musing tone, he said, "Poor Clarence! you are woefully deceived in your saint of an aunt!"

"Shall I continue my story, Mr. Rainford?" asked Jacob. "It will not last much longer now."

"By all means go on, my boy. I would sit here till day-light, sooner than miss the end."

Thus encouraged, Jacob continued in the following manner:

CHAPTER XL.

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF JACOB SMITH.

"ON my return to Earl Street, Seven Dials, which was at about three o'clock in the morning, I found Old Death and Mrs. Bunce sitting up for me, Toby having gone to bed. I related the adventures which I had met with, but said not a word about the intrigue of the lady and the baronet; for I could not help thinking that the kind treatment I had in the first instance received from Mrs. Slingsby, deserved the reward of secrecy on that head. Old Death *very kindly* permitted me to retain five pounds out of the money which I myself had obtained; and I hurried back to my lodging in St. Giles's. Peggy was in bed and fast asleep; and I lay down by her side without awaking her.

"When I again opened my eyes, the sun was shining in the brightness of a frost; air even through the dingy panes of my window; and I started up. Peggy had already risen; and I supposed she had gone out to get things for breakfast. But something like a suspicion arose in my mind—and I felt uneasy. I searched the pockets of the ragged pair of trousers I had purposely worn on the previous night, and the five sovereigns were gone. Now I was really alarmed: Peggy had certainly decamped. A farther search showed me that she had even carried off the few little articles of decent wearing apparel that I had, leaving me only the miserable rags in which I had appeared at Mrs. Slingsby's house. Yes—Peggy had run away with all I possessed that was worth the taking; and now the question naturally rose in my mind—'Will she betray me?' I thought her conduct was so suspicious, that I determined not to give her a chance if I could help it; particularly as I remembered the manner in which she took the beating I gave her, and which now made me think that she had resolved on being revenged. So I dressed myself in my tatters as quick as I could, and got away from the house. But at the end of the street I met a certain Mr. Dykes—the Bow Street runner, whom you happen to know, Mr. Rainford—and though I

endeavoured to dive into a narrow court, he pounced upon me in a twinkling.

"In less than an hour I stood in the felons' dock at the police-court, Bow Street, charged with a robbery committed by me in Bloomsbury Square, in the disguise of a sweep. I was remanded for a week, and sent in the meantime to Clerkenwell Prison. There I was placed in No. 12, Reception Yard, where Mrs. Bunce, who pretended to be my aunt in order to get admittance to me, visited me in the afternoon. She told me that Mr. Bones could not possibly come to see me, but that he would do all he could for me if I remained staunch and did not mention his name in any way—not even to my fellow-prisoners. 'We are afraid that you will be committed for trial,' said Mrs. Bunce; 'but all shall be done that can be done to buy off the witnesses. If that won't succeed, such evidence of former good character shall be given, that your sentence will be a light one; and in the meantime you shall have as much money as you want to live gloriously in prison. Mr. Bones has sent you up a sovereign for the present, and I will bring you a good suit of clothes to-morrow, so that you may go up swell before the beak next time. Be staunch, Jacob; and Mr. Bones will never desert you. But if you only mention his name to a soul in an improper way, he'll leave you to your fate, and you'll be transported.'—Mrs. Bunce impressed all this on my mind; but I assured her it was unnecessary, as I knew that I should not better my own plight in any very considerable degree by nosing against Bones, whereas he might be useful to me if I behaved well in the matter. She went away satisfied; and I spent the rest of the day in jollification with my fellow-prisoners, amongst whom my money raised me to the rank of a hero.*

"That night I slept in the Receiving Ward; and next morning I was taken to the bathing-room, a new suit of clothes having been already sent in to me by Mrs. Bunce. But I found that I was to bathe in the same water which had already served to wash the filthy bodies of several tramps who had also been sent to prison the day before on a charge of robbery; and I knew that when they entered they were covered with vermin. I therefore gave the turnkey half-a-crown to allow me to dispense with the bath, put on my new clothes, and was turned into the Felons' Yard. There I found persons, who had committed all degrees of crime, huddled together as if there was no difference in the charges against them. A boy who had stolen a pound of potatoes, value *one penny*—myself, who had stolen plate in a dwelling-house—a *gentleman*, who had wounded another in a duel and could not get bail, but who was a very superior person—a burglar—a coiner—and a man charged with *murder*, were all in one room together! It did not strike me then—but it has often struck me since—how wrong it was to put that boy who had stolen potatoes, along with a burglar, a coiner, and a practised thief as I was,—how unjust it was to put the gentleman with any of us,—and how shocking it was to put a murderer along with prisoners whose hands were not at least stained with blood. And what were the consequences? The boy, who had merely stolen the potatoes because his mother was ill and starving, and who had never done any thing

* The discipline of criminal prisons was particularly lax at the time of which Jacob Smith is supposed to be speaking.



wrong before, was entirely corrupted by the coiner, and made up his mind to turn prig the moment he got out;—the gentleman was worked up to such a pitch of excitement, by being in such society, that he was removed to the infirmary, and died of brain fever, as I afterwards heard;—the burglar helped the murderer to escape, and got safely away with him!

“Our amusements in gaol were chiefly gambling and drinking. Money procured as much liquor as we could consume; and with such I was well supplied. Cards and dice were not allowed, it is true; but we used to play with bits of wood cut and marked like dominoes, or by chalking the table into a draught-board, or by tossing halfpence. Then there was such fighting, quarrelling, and bad language, that nothing could equal the place! In the upper, or sleeping ward, things were much worse: the prisoners robbed each other. The very first night the duellist-gentleman was there, he lost his purse containing several sovereigns; and when he threatened to complain, he was quietly informed by the burglar and the murderer that if he did, he would be hung up to the bars of the window with

his own handkerchief the very next night, and his end would be attributed to suicide.*

“At the end of the week I was had up to Bow Street once more; and the evidence was so conclusive against me, that I was committed to Newgate for trial. Thus I had expected, and cared but little for, as Mrs. Bunce at each visit which she paid me at Clerkenwell Prison, assured me that Mr. Bones would do all he could for me. And he kept his word—but more, I suppose, for his own sake than mine. What a dreadful place I found Newgate to be! Hardened as I was—acquainted with all degrees of debauchery—and familiar with vice, I declare solemnly that I shrank from the scenes I there witnessed. Fighting, quarrelling, gambling, thieving, drinking, obscene talking, bullying, and corrupting each other,—all these took place to a great degree in the Clerkenwell Prison; but in Newgate they were carried out to an extent dreadful to think of, and associated with other crimes impossible to mention.†

* This dreadful state of things continued in the New Prison, Clerkenwell, up to the year 1838.

† The Report of the Prison Inspector of the Home Dis-

"I now seemed to awake, for the first time, from a long dream of wickedness, and to become aware of the frightful precipice on which I stood. My eyes were suddenly opened—and I shuddered. A man was hanged at the debtors' door, while I was in Newgate: and I saw him pass from the condemned cell to the kitchen, which is just within the debtors' door. I experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling, and took a solemn oath within my own breast that I would never thieve again. But as I

fract contains these observations upon the state of Newgate:—"The association of prisoners of all ages, and every shade of guilt, in one indiscriminate mass, is a frightful feature in the system which prevails here; the first in magnitude, and the most pernicious in effect. In this prison we find that the young and the old—the inexperienced and the practical offender—the criminal who is smitten with a conviction of his guilt, and the hardened villain whom scarcely any penal discipline can subdue, are congregated together, with an utter disregard to all moral distinctions, the interests of the prisoners, or the welfare of the community. In such a state of things, can it be a matter of wonder that the effects should be such as have been described? Every other evil is aggravated by this, and it would be worse than idle to attempt a remedy for the rest, while this demoralizing intermixture of criminals of all ages and degrees of guilt is suffered to frustrate the very ends of Prison discipline, and to give tenfold violence to all their mischievous inclinations, and passions, upon which it incessantly operating, and which it is the design of justice to discourage and repress. Apart from higher considerations, sound policy demands that such a system should be instantly rectified, for so long as it continues, society is nursing a moral pestilence in its bosom, and maintaining an institution in which are forged those weapons that are destined to be wielded with fatal dexterity against the community itself. Every device by which the fences of property may be overcome is here framed, and divulged to ready agents. Every fraudulent artifice, every successful trick, every ingenious mode of over-reaching the cautious, or of plundering the unguarded, is perfected here, and communicated to those who had not hitherto been initiated in the mysteries of crime.

But the most distressing circumstance connected with this system, is the cruel indifference with which it regards the condition and necessities of those on whom the extreme penalty of the law is doomed to fall. Prisoners actually awaiting the execution of the awful sentence of death are placed, by the evil influence of companionship, in the most unfavorable circumstances for self-reflection. Eyes, ears, and humanity combine to point out the impotence of a feigning of providing men, brought by the sentence of my law to the verge of eternity, with the means of steady improvement and consolation; but the system of discipline in Newgate practically defeats every such moral design. No human authority has a right thus to trifle with the eternal interests of a dying criminal. Against this heinous evil the chaplain has repeatedly and loudly protested; and it is in evidence that the unhappy victims themselves have earnestly implored the officers to deliver them from a situation in which it was impossible for them to devote the few remaining hours that the law allowed them to reflection and prayer. The companions in guilt of these wretched men become further hardened by the influence of this association. The indulgence of thoughtless apathy, unfeeling mirth, or revolting brutality, are productive of incalculable mischief to the minds of those who are subjected to their influence. The prisoner who witnesses with levity or indifference the last moments of a culprit in Newgate, comes forth a greater villain than when he went in. In him the evil principle has done its work, and the very exhibition of terror which justice designed for the reclaiming of the survivors, by a perversion of moral influence, irremediably hardens the heart which it was intended to soften and amend. If human ingenuity were tasked to devise means by which the most profligate of men might be rendered abandoned to the last degree of moral infamy, nothing more effectual could be invented than the system now actually in operation within the walls of the first metropolitan prison in England!"

knew nothing of religion, and could not read or write, I was not likely to reform very rapidly nor very completely. I still laughed and joked with my fellow-prisoners, and appeared to enter into most of their fun, though I really began to loathe them. But when the chaplain visited us, and the other boys jeered and mocked him, I stood by and dwelt on every word of gentle remonstrance that fell from his lips. Next Sunday I paid great attention to his sermon, while pretending to be asleep: for if I had been caught actually lending a patient ear to his discourse, my fellow-prisoners would have led me no peace afterwards. I understood but little—very little of that sermon: still I gleaned some notion of the existence of a Saviour a belief in whom was the stepping-stone to virtue. I also heard the happiness of heaven explained for the first time: but I must confess that I was greatly puzzled when the chaplain declared that the man who was hanged for a dreadful murder on the preceding Monday, had gone to that place of joy, because he had repented in his last moments—for I thought to myself, 'Well, then, a human being is quite safe in leading as terrible a life as he chooses, as long as he repents at the end.' And, again, I was bewildered when I heard the clergyman say these words, which made so great an impression on me that I have never forgotten them, and never shall:—"As I stood with that penitent man on the drop, last Monday morning, I ENVIED HIM HIS FATE, because I knew that his soul was about to ascend to heaven!"

"The day of my trial came; and I was placed in the dock before the Common Serjeant of London. The clerk of the Court asked me, '*How will you be tried—by God and your country?*'—I knew not what reply to make, and was actually on the point of saying 'that I would rather not be tried at all this time, since it seemed to be left to my own choice; and that I would faithfully promise never to thieve again,'—when the turnkey who had charge of me, whispered in my ear, 'You damned young fool, why don't you speak? Say '*By God and my country,*' damn you.'—I did as I was directed; and the trial commenced. The charge against me was fully proved; and a verdict of *Guilt* was recorded. The Common-Serjeant asked if I had ever been convicted before. The keeper of Newgate, who was present, said I had not. The counsel who had been retained for me by Old Death, then requested to be allowed to call witnesses to character. This was permitted; and three or four tradesmen, who I well knew were Old Death's friends, got up one after the other, and swore that I had been in their service (each one of course giving different periods of time), and that I was an honest, hard-working, and industrious lad, until I fell into bad company and got into trouble. Dykes, the runner, was then questioned about me; and he said that I was not known as a thief—although he knew the contrary perfectly well. But Old Death had kept his word, and had not spare his gold. My offence was, however, a grave one—robbing in a dwelling-house; and there were two or three other indictments of the same kind against me, though the prosecutors did not come forward. Old Death had made it right with them too. I was accordingly condemned to seven years' transportation, with a hint that this sentence would be commuted to two years' imprisonment at the hulks.

"I was but little more than eleven when my career of crime was thus interrupted; and I was glad that it *was* so interrupted—for I resolved that it should not be renewed when I regained my liberty. This was scarcely a resolution produced by moral considerations, but by fear; and it therefore required strengthening. Whether it was, or not, I shall soon inform you.

"A few days after the sessions terminated, I was removed with several other boys to the *Euryalus* Convict-Hulk at Woolwich. This vessel has three decks: the upper is appropriated to lads convicted the first time, the second to the next grade of juvenile criminals, and the third, or lowest, to the worst kind of offenders. I was assigned to the upper deck, where there were about sixty of us. On being received on board we were first sent to the wash-house, where we were bathed and well cleansed; and we then received the suit of dark grey that denotes the felon. Our employment was to make clothes for the entire establishment: that is, shirts, jackets, waistcoats, and trousers. The person who taught us was a convict-boy, who had been a tailor: the cutters-out belonged to the second deck, and visited our department as often as their services were required.

"We were divided into sections, each having at its head a boy selected as the chief on account of his good conduct when in prison. I will describe the routine of the day—taking the period when the summer regulations are in force. At five o'clock in the morning all hands were called, the ports were opened, the hammocks were lowered and lashed up, and we washed ourselves for chapel. At half-past five the signal was given for prayers; and we went to the chapel in sections, or divisions, taking our seats in profound silence. The morning hymn was sung: the schoolmaster read the prayers; and we returned to our wards on the upper deck. There we stood in ranks till six o'clock, when breakfast was served. The steward of the ship superintended the giving out of the provisions, and saw that each boy had his fair allowance of bread and gruel. This being done, the steward ordered each rank, one after the other, to approach the tables, hold up the bread, say grace, and then sit down and eat. At half-past six, we were marshalled on the quarter-deck, in divisions; and the officers of the hulk were then prepared to hear any complaints or receive any reports that might have to be submitted to them. Such complaints were noted down for after investigation. Some of the boys were kept above to wash the quarter-deck, and the remainder were sent down to cleanse their own deck. At eight o'clock we were all set to work at tailoring, a strict silence being preserved. At nine o'clock the report upon the complaints was received from the commander of the hulk, and the punishments awarded were made known:—such as a good thrashing with a cane, stopping the dinner, or solitary confinement on bread and water. At twelve o'clock the dinners were served out, the steward superintending. The quartermasters and guards were also present, to see that one boy's allowance was not taken from him by another. From half-past twelve to half-past one we were allowed to take air and exercise on the quarter-deck, but without making any noise. At half-past one we were marched down again to our work. At two, a section of one-third of us was sent into the chapel, where we were taught

reading and writing by the schoolmaster. At five we left off work or schooling, cleaned the wards, and then washed ourselves. This being done, supper was served out; and we went on the quarter-deck again for air and exercise till seven, when we were once more marched to the chapel for evening prayers and the catechism. At eight o'clock we returned to our own deck, where the signal was given for getting out the hammocks and slinging them up. At nine profound silence was ordered; and the whole ship was then as quiet as if there was not a soul on board,—this deep tranquillity being only broken by the striking of the bell and the cry of '*All's well!*' every half-hour.

"Such was the life led on board the *Euryalus* convict-hulk. But I was happier—much happier there than I had ever been before. The schoolmaster was an excellent man, and took a delight in teaching those who were anxious to learn. I was of this number, and my improvement was rapid. I quite won his regard, and he devoted unusual pains to instruct me; so that at the end of a year he obtained leave for me to give up the making of clothes and assist him as an usher. This was an employment that pleased me greatly, and allowed me plenty of time to read the books lent me by the worthy schoolmaster. So fond was I of reading, that I used to take a book with me on the quarter-deck at those times devoted to air and exercise; and sitting apart from the others, I would remain buried in study until it was time to go below again. I examined how books were written and how I was accustomed to speak: that is—I compared the language of those books with my own; and I was shocked to find how wretchedly ignorant I had hitherto been in respect to grammar. This ignorance I strove hard—oh! very hard to surmount; and the good schoolmaster assisted me to the utmost of his power. I read and studied the Bible with avidity; and the more I became acquainted with it, the more fixed grew my determination to avoid a relapse into the ways of crime when I should be released.

"During the two years that I passed at the hulk, Mrs. Bunce came very often to see me, passing herself off as my aunt; but relations were not allowed to speak to us except in the presence of a guard, and so the name of Old Death was never mentioned by either of us. But Mrs. Bunce used to tell me that '*my uncle would give me a home when my time was up;*' and I supposed by this, that she meant her husband Toby. I knew that Old Death was the person who had directed these assurances to be given me; and often and often did I lay awake of a night, deliberating within myself what I should do when I was set free, to earn an honest livelihood and avoid the hateful necessity of returning to the service of Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"At length the day of liberation came—and I had no plan of proceedings settled. My clothes were given to me, and a shilling was put into my hand by the steward. The old schoolmaster was absent at the time; and I was sorry that I had not an opportunity of thanking him for all his kindness and imploring his advice how to proceed. It struck me that I would appeal to the commander of the hulk. I did so, and solicited him to counsel me how to get an honest livelihood. He burst out laughing in my face, exclaiming, '*I suppose you think I am to be deceived by your humbug, and*

that I shall put my hand into my pocket and give you half-a-guinea to see your way with. No such thing, my lad! I used to do so when I was first here; but those I assisted in that way were always the first to come back again."—And he turned on his heel, leaving me quite astounded at the reception my sincerity of behaviour had experienced. But a few moments' reflection showed me that I could scarcely blame him for his conduct; and I quitted the ship in tears.

"The moment I stepped from the boat that landed me in Woolwich, I met Mrs. Bunce. She threw her arms round my neck, and called me her '*dear Jacob*,' in such a loving manner that one would really have believed her to be my aunt, or even my mother if she had chosen to represent herself so. Then, pointing to a public-house at a little distance, she said, 'Your good and kind friend Mr. Bones is there; and he will be so delighted to see you. He has ordered a nice steak and some good ale, and we mean to let you enjoy yourself.'—The idea of having such a glorious repast after being kept on short commons on board the *Euryalus*, made my mouth water; but then I remembered all the influence Old Death had been accustomed to exercise over me—and I knew that if I once again entered within its range, I should never have the moral courage to withdraw from it. So my mind was made up; and suddenly darting down a bye-street, I was beyond Mrs. Bunce's view in a twinkling. I heard her shrill, screaming voice call after me; but I heeded it not—and hurried onward, as if escaping from a wild beast.

"Presently I relaxed my speed, and at length entered a public-house, where I called for a pint of beer. Two or three soldiers and as many young women were sitting at another table, drinking, and indulging at the same time in the most filthy discourse. Suddenly one of the females started up, advanced towards me, and, after considering me for a few moments, exclaimed with a terrible oath, 'Well, I thought it must be my old fancy cove Jacob!'—and she offered to embrace me. I however repulsed her with loathing; for in the miserable, tattered, sickly wretch before me, I had already recognised Peggy Wilkins. She seemed ashamed of herself for a minute; then, recovering her impudence, she said, 'Damn and blast you for a sulky, snivelling hound! Who the devil are you that you can't treat me civilly? Do you think I don't know all that's happened to you? Why, you've only this moment left the hulks—and you can't deny it.'—The soldiers, hearing this, demanded if it was true; and, without waiting for my answer, thrust me out of the place. I had reached the end of the street, when I recollected that I had not received the change for my shilling, which I had tendered in payment of the beer. I therefore went back to ask for it; but the pot-boy who had served me, swore that I never gave him a shilling at all; and the landlord evidently believed that I was a vagabond endeavouring to swindle his servant. So I was kicked out—penniless!

"I was for some time before I could muster up courage to adopt any plan for my support. Indeed, I sat down in a retired nook and cried bitterly. I even regretted having left the hulk, so miserable did I feel. At last hunger compelled me to act; and I entered a shop to inquire if a boy was wanted. The man behind the counter said he did not require

the assistance of a lad, but that a neighbour of his would probably hire me. I went to the place pointed out to me, and, having explained my business, was asked for testimonials of good character. I candidly confessed that I had just been discharged from the *Euryalus*, but that I thought the school-master on board would recommend me. The man flew into a dreadful passion, and rushing round from behind the counter, would have kicked me out of the shop, if I had not run away of my own accord.

"I am sure that I tried twenty different shops that day in Woolwich. At some I explained my position—at others I carefully concealed the fact of my late ignominious punishment. But character—character—character! where was it? Even for a starving lad who only asked a fair trial—who promised to work from sunrise to sunset, and to be content with a morsel of bread to eat and a cellar to sleep in, as a recompense for his toils,—even to one who offered so much and required so little in return, character was necessary! Night came—I was famishing and in despair. At length a charitable baker gave me a roll; and my hunger was appeased. It struck me that the tradesmen at Woolwich were perhaps more cautious than people elsewhere how they engaged the services of young lads, in consequence of that place being a station for the convict hulks; and I therefore resolved to try my luck in another quarter. I set out for Greenwich, which I reached at midnight, and slept till morning in a shed near some houses that were being built. Cold, famished, and dispirited did I awake; and with a sinking heart I commenced my rounds. Before noon I had called at a hundred shops, public-houses, or taverns, without success. Few required the service of boys; and those people who did, demanded references. I begged a piece of bread of a baker, and then set off for London.

"So slow did I walk, and so often was I compelled to rest, that it was evening before I reached the Blackfriars Road. There, again, did I endeavour to procure honest employment—but in vain! I remember that when one shop-keeper—an old man—listened to me with more attention than the rest, I burst into tears and implored—besought—prayed him to receive me into his service, if it was only to *save me from becoming a thief*! I did not tell him I had already been one. But he shook his head, saying sorrowfully, 'If you have already thought of turning thief, your morals must be more than half corrupted.'—He gave me a few halfpence, and I went away.

"I balanced for some minutes between the cravings of my stomach and the fatigue of my limbs—that is, whether I should spend those halfpence in food or on a bed. I decided in favour of the food, and having satisfied my hunger, crept into a timber-yard on the bank of the Thames, and slept there till morning. I awoke at sunrise, and crossed Blackfriars Bridge. My limbs shivered with ague, and my clothes were damp with the dews of night. I knew not what to do—which way to turn. Hope had deserted me. There was I, a poor—wretched—houseless—friendless—starving being, anxious to remain honest, yet impelled by circumstances towards a relapse into the career of vice. I prayed as I went along the streets,—yes, I prayed to God to save me from that dreadful—that last resource. But no succour came. All day long did I rove about: night arrived again—and for twenty-four

hours I had eaten nothing. I dragged myself back to the timber yard; but there was a great dog prowling about—and I dared not enter. I sought shelter elsewhere, for the rain began to descend in torrents; but I was wet through before I could even find the entrance of a court to screen me. I never slept a wink that night: I was afraid to lie down on the cold stones—they were so chill. Morning came again—and I was now so weak that I could hardly put one foot before another. I was more-over starving—yes, *starving*! I passed a baker's shop and saw the nice hot bread smoking in the windows, and I went in to implore a stale crust. But I was ordered out; and then the idea struck me that in a few minutes I might obtain money to buy a good breakfast—not only bread, but meat and tea! That was by picking a pocket! The idea, however, assumed a horrible aspect a moment afterwards—and I recoiled from it. No: I would sooner plunge into the river and end my woes there—than steal again!

"To the river's brink I hurried—dragging myself slowly no more—but running, yes—absolutely running fast to terminate my wretchedness by suicide. It was near Westminster Bridge that I was on the point of throwing myself into the Thames, when my collar was suddenly grasped from behind, and I was drawn back. I turned—and saw Old Death!

"Then I uttered a scream, and struggled dreadfully to get away, that I might still accomplish my purpose; but he held me tight, saying, 'Silly boy! why do you fly from life, since it may yet have many pleasures for you?'—'No!' I cried: 'I will never become a thief again!'—'And I will never ask you to do so,' he replied. 'But come with me, and let us talk over your prospects.'—'Prospects!' I repeated in a hysterical manner; and then I followed him mechanically to an early breakfast-house close by. He ordered a plentiful meal; and I ate ravenously. The food and hot coffee cheered me; and I began to feel grateful to Bones for having supplied the means to appease the hunger that was devouring me. Moreover, one looks with quite a different eye upon suicide after a good meal; and I could not do otherwise than regard him as the saviour of my life. I was therefore already prepared to listen to him with attention; and when he proposed that we should repair to Bunce's, where we could converse without fear of being overheard, I willingly agreed to accompany him. But during our walk to Seven Dials, I constantly repeated within my own breast the most solemn vows not to yield to any threats or representations—menaces or coaxings—to induce me to become a thief again!

"When we reached the house in Earl Street, Mrs. Bunce received me with more kindness than I had expected to meet at her hands, after the trick I had played her a few days before at Woolwich. But she did not treat me thus without a motive; for when once she and Old Death got me between them, they endeavoured to the utmost of their power to persuade me to resume my old avocations. I was faithful to my vow, and assured them that they might kill me sooner than I would again do any thing to risk imprisonment in that horrible Newgate. It was not the hulk I so much dreaded—nor yet transportation, because I knew nothing of it; but I shrunk from the mere idea of going through the ordeal of Newgate a second time. Old Death

saw that I was not to be moved—at least then; and he gave up the point. 'But,' said he, 'you must do something to get a living: you can't starve; and *we* won't maintain you in idleness. If you like, I'll take you into my service to run on errands, look after people that I want to learn any thing about and make yourself useful in that way; and I'll give you a shilling a-day.'—I agreed—for I could not starve.

"Now, of course it is as plain to you as it was even then to me, that Old Death was playing a deep game with me. I was the cleverest thief that ever served him; and he had received ample—ample proofs that he could trust me. He knew that he was safe with me. I was therefore too useful a person to lose; and he thought that by throwing me again amongst my old companions, and keeping me on very short allowance, the disagreeable impressions of gaol would soon wear away, and I should relapse into my old habits. He was quite mistaken. I do n't pretend that any particular idea of virtue made a great change in me; but I had been in Newgate—and *there I had seen a man going out to be hanged*; and I thought that if I got into that dreadful gaol a second time, I should become hardened, and that I also should go out some day to be hanged! So I resisted all temptation—and lived as well as I could on the shilling a day, without increasing my means by theft or villany.

"This mode of life on my part did not suit Old Death. A few weeks passed, and when he found that I was resolved not to return to my former ways, he stopped my allowance altogether. I was now steeped to the very lips in wretchedness and misery: but somehow or another I managed to get a crust here and there just to keep body and soul together—although I oftener slept in the open air than in a bed. Mrs. Bunce showed me a little kindness now and then, but quite unknown to Old Death; and, to my surprise, she did not urge the necessity of my returning to the career of theft. For several weeks I saw nothing of Mr. Bones; but at last he fished me out in some low place, and told me I might return into his service if I liked, and that he should pay me according to the use I proved myself to be to him. To glean information for him—run on errands—dog and watch persons—or even loiter about in police-courts to hear what cases came up before the magistrates,—these were my chief duties; and badly enough they were paid. But I was now permitted to get my breakfast and tea regularly at the Bunces'; and that was something. As for my lodging, if I got together a few pence to enable me to hire a bed, or a part of a bed, in one of those low houses that I have already described to you, I was contented,—for I always had this consolation, that I could walk about the streets without being afraid of meeting a Bow-Street runner."

Jacob paused—for his tale was told.

"Well, my boy," said Tom Rain, "you have gone through much, and seen enough to form a good stock of experience. I commend your resolution never to put yourself within reach of the law again; for that's just my determination also. You have got money in your pocket now; and I will do something more for you before I leave England."

"Ah! Mr. Rainford," exclaimed Jacob, much affected, "how I wish that I had met with such a friend as you earlier in life! And how I wish, too,

that I could go with you—wherever you are going—and be your servant—your slave!”

“Well—well, Jacob, we will talk of that another time,” said Tom. “Rest assured I will not desert you. Call at Tullock’s on Monday evening, and you will either see me there or find a note from me.”

Jacob was overjoyed at the species of promise thus held out to him; and, as it was now midnight, Rainford intimated his intention of taking his departure from the public-house where he had passed the evening with the poor lad.

When they had issued from the door, the highwayman bade Jacob “Good night;” and they separated—pursuing different roads.

In fact, Jacob went towards Leather Lane, while Tom Rainford repaired in the direction of the lodgings which he at present occupied in Gray’s Inn Lane—he having removed to that locality from his former abode in Lock’s Fields.

CHAPTER XLI.

FRESH ALARMS.

RAINFORD was within twenty yards of the house in which he dwelt, when a woman jostled him somewhat violently as she endeavoured to pass him while pursuing the same direction.

There was no excuse for this rudeness on her part, inasmuch as the pavement was wide in that particular spot, and no other person was on the footway.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said the female; “I’m sure—But, bless me!” she cried, in a shrill, unmistakable voice,—“if it is n’t Mr. Rainford!”

“Ah! Mrs. Bunce,” returned the highwayman; “what are you doing in this neighbourhood’ so late?”

“I’m going to pass the night with a relation of mine that’s ill, and which lives at the top of the Lane,” answered Mrs. Bunce. “But, Oh! Mr. Rainford, what a shocking thing this is about poor dear Mr. Bones!”

“What?” ejaculated Tom, with a kind of guilty start.

“Why, sir—he’s dead, poor man!” sobbed Mrs. Bunce: “dead and buried, sir!”

“Dead—and buried!” repeated the highwayman mechanically. “And how came you to know this?”

“His friend Mr. Tidmarsh came and told me and Toby about it this blessed morning; and in the afternoon we all followed the poor old gentleman to the grave in Clerkenwell churchyard.”

“His death was sudden, then?” said Tom, anxious to glean how far the woman might be informed relative to the particulars of the event which she was deploring.

“Mr. Tidmarsh is n’t given to gossiping, sir,” replied Mrs. Bunce; “and he said very little about it. It was quite enough for us to know that the poor dear old gentleman is gone—and without having made any Will either: so me and Toby are thrown as you may say on the wide world, without a friend to help us.”

“But Mr. Bones was rich—very rich—was he not?” demanded Tom, who felt particularly un-

comfortable at this confirmation of his worst fears—for he to some extent looked upon himself as the cause of the old fence’s sudden death.

“Rich, God bless ye! Ah! as rich as a King!” exclaimed Mrs. Bunce. “But no one knows where he kept his money—unless it is that Tidmarsh.”

“And where did he die?” asked Rainford.

“At Tidmarsh’s own place in Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell,” was the answer. “Poor old man! But you must have seen him only a short time before he went off, Mr. Rainford,” she added, as if recollecting the fact: “for it was on that very night when he took Toby and Jacob over with him to a house in Lock’s Fields, and which turned out to be where you lived. You know he stayed with you while Jacob and Toby went away. Poor old man! he’s a great loss—a very great loss!”

“Were you so dependent on him, then?” asked Rainford.

“Yes, almost entirely, as I may say,” was the reply. “And then there’s poor Jacob, too: what in the world he’ll do, I’m sure I can’t say—for me and Toby can’t afford to keep him now that our best friend’s gone. But good night, Mr. Rainford: I must go on to my cousin’s—for it’s very late, and *she*, may be, will pop off the hooks before I get to her.”

“Good night,” returned Tom, slackening his pace so as to allow the woman to proceed as far a-head of him as possible ere he entered his own dwelling, which was now close at hand.

In a few moments the form of Mrs. Bunce was lost in the darkness of the night.

Rainford was now convinced that Old Death was indeed no more—that no prompt assistance had resuscitated him, even if the vital spark were not extinct at the moment when he saw him for the last time, bound to the chair, at the house in Red Lion Street. Yes—it was clear enough—too clear: Benjamin Bones was dead—and Tidmarsh had pounced upon all his property.

“Well—let him enjoy it,” thought Rainford within himself. “I have enough for my purposes, and do not wish to dispute the inheritance with him—even if I had the right or the power. And yet—and yet,” he mused, with a feeling like a contraction of the heart, “I would give ten years of my own life so that I had not been the instrument of abridging his! But it’s too late to repent or regret. Repent, did I say? I have nothing to repent of. I did not do this deed wilfully: it was not murder. And as for any share that I had in the matter at all, that does not seem to be suspected. Oh! I can understand Master Tidmarsh’s proceedings! It was no doubt he who entered the room just at the moment when I discovered that Old Death was dead. Of course he would say nothing about finding him tied in a chair, or of me having been with him that night: a word on these heads would have excited suspicions—led to inquiries—Coroner’s inquest—and all that sort of thing. Then some relation might have turned up, claimed the property, and cut Tidmarsh out. Yes—yes; it is plain enough—and Tidmarsh is a prudent as well as a lucky fellow! But what *could* the laboratory in that house mean? what were those pickled human heads kept in the cupboard for? and why was Dr. Lascelles familiar with that den?”

Even in the midst of his musings, Rainford did not hazard a conjecture to account for the mysteries

just enumerated. They indeed appeared unaccountable.

The highwayman walked some distance past the door of his lodgings, to convince himself that he was not watched by Mrs. Bunce; and having assured himself on that head,—at least so far as he could judge in the darkness of the night,—he turned back and entered his dwelling.

The next day was the Sabbath; and Rainford was sitting, after breakfast, reading a Sunday paper in the neat parlour of his lodgings.

On the other side of the fire sate a young—beautiful—and dark-eyed woman—in all the rich flush of Jewish beauty,—the softly sweeping outline and symmetrical undulations of her form being developed, rather than concealed, by the loose morning wrapper which she wore; while the ray of the frosty morning's sun glanced on the glossy surface of her raven hair.

Little Charley Watts, nicely dressed, and with his rosy countenance wearing the smiles of happy innocence, was seated on a footstool near Tom Rain, looking at a picture-book, but every now and then glancing affectionately towards those whom he had already learnt to love as if they were his parents.

"Do the advertisements tell you when the next ship will sail from Liverpool for New York, Tom?" inquired the lady.

"Next Friday, my love," answered Rainford. "We will therefore leave London on Thursday."

"Four more days," remarked his female companion. "Oh! how glad I shall be when we are out of sight of England! And yet," she added, with a profound sigh, "I can scarcely bear the thought of parting—perhaps for ever—"

"You must not give way to those mournful reflections," interrupted Tom, in a kind tone. "Remember that we are going to a country where my personal safety will not be endangered,—where we shall not be obliged to shift our lodgings half-a-dozen times in a fortnight,—and where, too, we need not start at every knock that comes to the door. We shall be as happy as the day is long; and, with the money which I now have at my disposal, I may embark in some honest pursuit and earn myself a good name."

"The money will be at the New York banker's before we reach America, I suppose?" said the lady, inquiringly.

"To be sure," replied Tom; "since I paid it all into the hands of the London agent two days ago. Have you taken care of the receipt, or acknowledgment?"

"I locked it up in the little iron box, together with all your other papers," was the answer.

"And those documents that I brought home with me the other night—or rather morning—"

"All safe, dear Tom. But really when you allude to that dreadful night, you make me shudder. Oh! how long—how long did those weary hours seem, until you returned! When you came up into the bed-room and told me that you were going away with that dreadful man Bones—that the time had at length come—that opportunity had at last served your purposes—"

"Well, my dear girl—I recollect all that took place," interrupted Tom, laughing. "You begged me not to go with him—you said you had your misgivings: but I was resolved—for such an occasion might not have occurred again. Did I not tell you

before-hand, when we were down in the country, that if I came up to London and purposely threw myself in the way of Old Death, accident would be sure sooner or later to enable me to wrench from his grasp that gold of which he had plundered me? And have not my words come true? You must not reproach me now, dear girl, at all events—for the danger is over."

"Yes—and the dreadful man is dead!" exclaimed the Jewess, in a tone which expressed a thanksgiving so unequivocally that a cloud for a moment gathered on Rainford's brow.

"He is dead—and can molest us no more," he observed, in a serious tone. "But I could have wished—However," he added, abruptly, "let us avoid that subject: it is not altogether an agreeable one. And now, to return to our intended departure for America, I am somewhat at a loss how to act in respect to that letter, which I obtained last night from Jacob Smith, and which so deeply regards—"

He paused, and glanced significantly towards Charley.

"What can you do in the matter, Tom?" said his beautiful companion. "The letter is too ambiguous—"

"Scarcely ambiguous—but deficient in certain points of information," interrupted Rainford.

"Which is equally mortifying," added the Jewess. "You cannot risk your safety by remaining in England to investigate the affair—even if we had not gone so far in our arrangements for departure—"

"Certainly not," replied Tom: "but I was thinking that I would entrust the letter to my friend Clarence Villiers; and who knows but that some accident may sooner or later throw him into the way of sifting the mystery to the very bottom?"

"Your project is an excellent one," answered the Jewess. "But are you sure that he does not suspect—"

"Suspect what I really am!" ejaculated the highwayman, with that blithe, merry laugh of his which showed his fine white teeth to such advantage. "Not he! He does not know Sir Christopher Blunt—nor the lawyer Howard; and his acquaintance with that consummate fool Frank Curtis was always slight, and not likely to be improved by all that has occurred: for Frank *must* suspect that Clarence had something to do with the elopement of Old Torrens's daughters. So, all things considered, Clarence cannot have heard of the little affair by which Sir Christopher lost his two thousand pounds."

"Then you will entrust Mr. Villiers with the letter?" said the lady, inquiringly.

"Yes: I will call upon him this evening," responded Tom; "for I have a little hint to give him relative to a certain aunt of his—"

At this moment there was a knock at the front-door of the house; and the servant presently made her appearance to inform Rainford that a young man named Jacob Smith wished to speak to him.

Tom's brow darkened—as the thought flashed across him that the lad had dogged him on the preceding night. But instantly recovering his self-possession, he desired the Jewess and Charley to retire to another room, while he received the visitor.

When Jacob entered the parlour, Rainford looked sternly at him, but said nothing.

"I know what is—what *must* be passing in your

"And, sir," said Jacob hastily; "but you wrong me—that is, if you think I found out your address by any underhand means of my own."

"Sit down, my boy" cried Tom frankly: "I am sorry if I suspected you even for an instant. But what has brought you here this morning? and how—"

"I will explain all in a few moments, Mr. Rainford," said Jacob. "Two hours ago—at about eight o'clock—I went up to Bunce's, just to see if they had heard any thing of Old Death; and, to my surprise, I learnt that he was buried yesterday."

"So I have already heard. But go on."

"You know I told you last night that yesterday morning two or three people called in Earl Street to inquire about Old Death, as he had promised to get a thief off at the police-court? Well—at that time, it seems, neither Mrs. Bunce or Toby knew what had become of Mr. Bones: but just afterwards, as I'm told, and when I had gone away from the house, up goes old Tidmarsh, the fence, with the news that Mr. Bones was dead, and that the funeral was going to take place in a couple of hours. Quick work, was n't it, sir? So Toby Bunce and his wife went to the funeral; and now it's certain what has really become of Old Death. Tidmarsh told them he died suddenly three or four days ago at his house—of apoplexy. I'm sure he did n't look much like an apoplectic man."

"The best part of all this I learnt last night, soon after I left you," said Rainford.

"And I only heard it when I went up to Bunce's this morning," remarked Jacob. "Well, sir—when Mrs. Bunce had told me this, she said, '*Jacob, I want you to do a particular favour for me, and I will give you a sovereign.*'—I asked her what it was."

"I'm pretty sure," she says, '*that Mr. Rainford lives somewhere in Gray's Inn Lane, between Liquorpond Street and Calthorpe Street, on the same side of the way as those streets; and you must find out where it is, because I want particularly to know.*'—So I promised her I would; and I of course took good care not to say that I had seen you last night. But I was determined to give you notice of Mrs. Bunce's desire to have you watched; and I have been knocking at every door in the neighbourhood, asking if such a gentleman as yourself lived there. In describing you, however, I did not mention any name."

"That was right, Jacob," said Tom; "because I am not known as Rainford here. But what the devil can that old wretch want with me? Has she inherited Old Death's scheming disposition? or does his vengeance pursue me, even from the tomb?"

These last words were totally unintelligible to Jacob, who knew not that the highwayman had had any share in the death of Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"Of course, sir," remarked the lad, after a pause, "I shall go to Mrs. Bunce this evening and assure her that no such person as yourself lives in this neighbourhood. I hope you are not offended with me for hunting after you?"

"Far from it, Jacob," returned Tom: "for I am sure I can trust you. At the same time, you must be cautious how you act, so as not to let Mrs. Bunce imagine that you are playing her false. Try and find out what she wants with me, and meet me at Tullock's to-morrow evening, between seven and eight. No—not at Tullock's either—because that woman knows I am in the habit of going there: but come to me at the public-house in Baldwin's

Buildings where we were last night. Remember—to-morrow evening, at about half-past seven."

"I shall not fail, sir," responded Jacob: and he then took his departure.

The moment he was gone, Rainford hastened up stairs to the bed-room, whither the Jewess and little Charley had retired; and closing the door, he said, "My dear girl, we must be off directly. That horrid woman Mrs. Bunce, of whom I have spoken to you, is after me—and I am afraid for no good."

"Off!" exclaimed the lady: "what—to Liverpool at once?"

"No: but to another lodging—or to a tavern rather—for it will be difficult to obtain apartments on a Sunday. I must stay in town for a day or two longer—or at least till I have seen Villiers. Come—pack up your things, my love—and let us be gone."

"Are you afraid of that lad who has just been?" demanded the Jewess.

"Not a whit! He is staunch to the back-bone—I will swear to it! But he might be followed—or he might commit himself somehow or another, and betray me involuntarily. By-the-bye," ejaculated Tom, after an instant's pause, "I tell you what we will do! We will return to Lock's Fields. It is clear that Mrs. Bunce has found out that we are not living there now—otherwise she would not have set this Jacob to watch me, which she has done; and she would never suspect that we have gone back to our old quarters. So look alive, my love; and pack up the things, while I settle with our land-lady here and send for a coach."

Tom Rain's directions were speedily obeyed; and by mid-day the Jewess, Charley, and himself were once more located in Lock's Fields.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PARAGRAPH IN THE NEWSPAPER.

HAVING partaken of a good dinner and imbibed a glass or two of wine, Tom Rain returned to the perusal of the Sunday newspaper, which he had brought with him to his old lodgings; for the highwayman loved a newspaper dearly—especially the police reports and Old Bailey trials.

But as his eye glanced down a column principally devoted to "Fashionable Intelligence," he was struck with mingled horror and astonishment by the ensuing announcement:—

"It is rumoured that the young and wealthy Earl of Ellingham will shortly lead to the hymeneal altar, the beautiful and accomplished Lady Hatfield. Her ladyship is a peeress in her own right, that distinction having been conferred upon her in consequence of the eminent services of her ladyship's deceased father."

Tom Rain was absolutely stupefied by this paragraph:—so stupefied, indeed, that he sat gazing upon it in a species of vacant wonderment,—not starting, nor uttering any ejaculation—so that neither the Jewess nor Charley Watts, who were both in the room, noticed his emotion.

At length he recovered himself, and read and re-read the paragraph until he could have repeated it by heart.

The shades of evening were gathering fast over this hemisphere; and he had therefore now a good excuse for going out—for that announcement in



the Sunday paper had produced such an effect upon him that he felt he could not rest until he had performed a duty—an imperious but most painful duty!

Having hastily arranged his toilette in the bedroom up stairs, and put on a dark upper coat and a large woollen “comforter,” he sallied forth—but not without having previously kissed both the Jewess and little Charley.

At the nearest coach-stand he entered a hack-vehicle, and ordered the driver to take him to the residence of Lady Hatfield, in Piccadilly.

But ere the coach arrived quite opposite the front door of the fair patrician’s abode, Rainford alighted, and dismissed the vehicle.

Then he advanced to the house:—but it was with the step of a man who would rather—oh! a thousand times rather—have fled in any other direction.

His hand was on the knocker, and he hesitated,—yes, he hesitated; and that hand trembled.

It must have been some powerful cause that could have made the gallant—dauntless—almost hair-brained Tom Rain manifest so much emotion.

But at length the summons was given; and a livery-servant opened the door.

To Rainford’s inquiry whether Lady Hatfield were at home, an affirmative answer was given.

“Say to your mistress,” returned the highwayman, “that a person wishes to speak to her upon very particular business—and do me the favour to show me to a room where I can see her ladyship alone.”

The servant hesitated a moment—for the excited tone in which the request was made somewhat surprised him. But remembering that it was not his business to question his lady’s visitors, he conducted Rainford into a parlour where a fire was burning in the grate; and, having lighted the candles, the domestic retired to deliver to Lady Hatfield the message which he had received.

The few minutes which elapsed ere the door of that room again opened, seemed like an age to Tom Rain. He first sat down: then he rose again and stood before the fire in a state of extraordinary nervousness. In fact, he appeared perfectly unmanned.

We can conceive the feelings of appalling doubt—hope mingled with terrific fear—and agonising

suspense, that must be experienced by an individual accused of a capital crime, and awaiting in the dock the return of the jury in whose hands are his life and death.

Such was the state of Tom Rain during the five mortal minutes that elapsed ere the door again opened.

At length it *did* open—and, though he had his back turned towards it, yet the rustling of silk and a light, airy tread convinced him that the lady of the house was now in that room.

He turned: the light streamed full upon his countenance—for he had laid aside his hat and woollen comforter; and Lady Hatfield—for it was she—uttered a faint scream as her eyes met his.

"Pardon this intrusion—fear me not *now*, my *ady!*" exclaimed Rainford hastily: "but grant me five minutes' attention, I implore you—not for *my* sake—for *yours!*"

Georgiana had started back, and had become pale as death when she recognised the highwayman: but even while he was yet speaking, she recovered herself sufficiently to approach the spot where he was standing.

Then, without sitting down—but leaning her arm upon the mantelpiece, as if for support,—she said in a hoarse and hollow tone, "My God! what would you wish me?"

"Lady Hatfield," returned Rainford, in a mournful and even solemn tone, "forget the *past*—if you can—for a few minutes—"

"Forget the *past!*" repeated Georgiana hysterically, her whole frame convulsed with horror. "Oh! terrible man, wherefore have you come hither? have you not injured me enough? what do you now seek?—*my life?*"

And, as she uttered these last words, the syllables seemed to hiss between her set teeth—and her bosom heaved and fell rapidly with spasmodic palpitation.

"Listen to me, madam—I implore you!" exclaimed Rainford, cruelly perplexed and deeply touched by the agonising emotions which his presence occasioned. "I know that the sight of me must be abhorrent—loathsome to you; but it will be your fault if our interview is protracted beyond the few minutes which I ask you to grant me."

"Speak, sir—speak quickly!" cried Georgiana, hysterically. "But mark me, sir," she added in a firmer and more resolute tone, while her usually placid glances seemed to glare with deadly hatred against the highwayman,—"*mark me,*" she repeated—"if your intention be to coerce me again to commit a crime for your sake, you will not succeed. But a few days have elapsed since the stain of perjury—rank, abhorrent perjury—was fastened on my soul—and to save *you!* Oh! that I could have been so weak as to yield to your insolent command to swear to that which was false—atrociously, vilely false, at the bar of justice! And now proceed, sir, with the business which has brought you hither!"

"Lady Hatfield—I cannot, I dare not explain myself, while you labour under this dreadful excitement!" said Rainford, himself painfully excited. "Calm yourself, I implore you—for what I have to say most nearly concerns your interests."

"*My interests!*" repeated Georgiana in a sorrowful voice. "But proceed—go on, sir—I *will* be calm."

"I observed in a newspaper of this day's date,"

continued Rainford, "that your ladyship is about to become the wife of the Earl of Ellingham."

Lady Hatfield gazed upon the highwayman in that vacant manner which left it doubtful whether she were the prey to feelings of surprise—terror—or despair.

"And if that rumour be true, my lady," added Rainford, after a moment's pause, "I would have you reflect on the propriety of this matrimonial connexion."

"My God! he assumes a right to dictate to me!" almost shrieked Georgiana, as she sank back upon a sofa, clasping her hands together in the excess of her mental anguish.

"No—my lady—not to dictate!" said Rainford. "I have not a shadow of a right to do that: it were the height of madness—the height of presumption—an insolence beyond all parallel on my part—in fact a deed so monstrously inconsistent with even common sense—"

"That you are surprised I should have entertained the idea?" added Georgiana, with an irony and bitterness which seemed lent her by despair.

"My God! I foresaw all the terrors of this interview!" exclaimed Rainford with feverish impatience.

"Then wherefore did you come?" demanded Georgiana. "Is it to expose me—to persecute *me* who have never offended *you*, but who have suffered so deeply—deeply—"

"Madam, I came to perform a painful duty," interrupted the highwayman; "and the sooner I accomplish it the better. Oh! you know not—you will not give me credit for the ineffable pity—the profound commiseration which I feel for you,—as well as the loathing—the abhorrence—the shame—the disgust in which I hold myself:—but I cannot recall the past. Would to God that I could!"

"Then you mean me no harm?" exclaimed Georgiana eagerly.

"Mean you harm, madam!" repeated Rainford enthusiastically: "merciful heavens! if to mitigate one single pang of the many—many with which your breast must throb, poor innocent sufferer that you are—a sufferer through my detestable crime,—if to relieve you of any portion of the load that weighs upon your mind—were that portion no heavier than a hair,—if to do this my life would suffice, I would lay it down, madam, at your feet! Think you that I glory in what I have done? No—no: bad as I am—criminal as I am—robber, plunderer as I am, and as you know me to be,—yet I have feelings—aye, and a conscience too! And, often—often, my lady, when the smile is upon my lip, that conscience is gnawing my heart's core—for I think of *you!* And all this is true as God's own justice is true,—true as that you are an innocent and a noble lady, and that I am a despicable villain!"

And Tom Rain—the gallant, dashing, almost hair-brained Tom Rain—burst into tears.

Georgiana gazed upon him in astonishment—in profound astonishment; and she was softened towards that bold and desperate man who wept on her account!

"But wherefore have you sought me this evening?" she said, in a milder and more gentle tone than she had yet used during this remarkable—this solemnly interesting meeting.

"It is not to demand your pardon, madam," returned Rainford, dashing away the tears from his

manly countenance; "because *that* you can never give! It is not to assert any presumed right to dictate to you in respect to your marriage, because *that* were adding the most flagrant cruelty to the most atrocious wrong. But it is to inform your ladyship that if you contract this marriage with the Earl of Ellingham, you wed one who is——"

"Who is what?" gasped Georgiana, almost suffocating.

Rainford paused for a few moments: it required these few moments to enable him to conquer emotions of so terrible a nature that they almost choked his powers of utterance:—then, bending down until his very lips touched Georgiana's ear, and his hair mingled with hers, he whispered a few words in a faint and scarcely audible tone.

But she heard them plainly—oh! far too plainly: and when he withdrew his face from its proximity to her head, and glanced upon her countenance, he saw, with feelings awfully shocked, that she sat mute—motionless—the image of despair.

Alas! she spoke not—she looked neither to the right nor to the left: her eyes seemed to be fixed upon the face of the highwayman;—and yet she saw him not—she was gazing on vacancy.

This dreadful state of stupefaction—the paralysis of despair—lasted for upwards of three minutes,—a perfect age alike to her who endured, and to him who beheld it.

Then suddenly burst from Lady Hatfield's lips a long—loud—piercing scream,—a scream so appalling that the very house appeared to shake with the vibration of the air which was cut by that shriek as by a keen-edged sword.

"Merciful God! the whole place will be alarmed!" ejaculated the highwayman. "Compose yourself, madam——"

But vainly did he thus address himself to the unhappy Georgiana: she had fallen back insensible upon the sofa.

The door opened abruptly; but Tom Rain was rooted to the spot where he stood gazing on the motionless form of that wretched lady,—stood gazing too in horrified amazement at the effect which his whispered words had produced.

The scream to which Lady Hatfield had given vent in the paroxysm of her ineffable anguish, had reached the ears not only of the domestics in the kitchen but also of the company in the drawing-room—for there were guests that evening at Georgiana's residence.

Thus, when the door burst open, a crowd of persons poured in,—Lord Ellingham, Dr. Lascelles, Sir Ralph Walsingham, three or four ladies, and all the servants.

Miss Mordaunt, we should observe, was no longer an inmate of Lady Hatfield's abode—for reasons that will be explained hereafter.

Lord Ellingham was the foremost of the crowd; and the first object that met his eyes, as he rushed into the room, was his Georgiana stretched senseless on the sofa. He saw a man standing near, but did not pause to cast a second glance upon him: the state in which he found his beloved engrossed all his thoughts.

He raised her in his arms—the ladies produced their smelling-bottles—the female servants hastened to fetch water, vinegar, and anything else that struck them as useful under the circumstances—and Dr. Lascelles, who had recognised Tom Rain, though

without appearing to do so, professionally superintended all the means resorted to for the purpose of restoring suspended animation,—while the highwayman still looked on with a kind of mechanical attention.

At length Georgiana opened her eyes slowly; but the moment they caught a glimpse of Lord Ellingham's countenance, a faint cry escaped her lips—and she covered her face with her hands as if to shut out some terrible object from her view.

"Georgiana, dearest—'tis I," murmured Arthur in her ear.

But a dreadful shudder seemed to convulse her entire frame.

"Some one has terrified her—alarmed her!" exclaimed the Earl, colouring with anger; and as he glanced rapidly around, his eyes met those of the highwayman.

At that moment Dr. Lascelles desired that Lady Hatfield should be supported to her own chamber; and this suggestion was immediately followed by the female friends and servants, the physician accompanying them.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LORD ELLINGHAM AND TOM RAINFORD.

LORD ELLINGHAM and Sir Ralph Walsingham remained behind in the apartment, where Rainford also still was.

"Sir," said the nobleman, advancing towards the highwayman, "you will perhaps be kind enough to explain the cause of her ladyship's emotion—for the scream which reached our ears, and the condition in which we found her, denote something more serious than sudden indisposition. This gentleman, sir," added the Earl, indicating Sir Ralph Walsingham with a glance, "is Lady Hatfield's uncle: you therefore need not hesitate to address yourself to *him*—even should you decline to vouchsafe an explanation to me, who am a total stranger to you."

"Yes, my lord—for I know you well by sight—we *are* total strangers to each other," replied Rainford in a singularly mournful tone. "And yet——"

But he stopped short, seized his hat, and was about to hasten from the room, when the Earl caught him somewhat rudely by the arm, saying,—
"Mr. Rainford—for such I believe to be your name—we cannot part with you thus! A lady—dear, very dear to me, and who indeed will shortly be my wife,—dear also to Sir Ralph Walsingham, who is now present,—that lady has been alarmed—terrified in some manner, by you; and we must insist upon an explanation."

"My lord," returned Tom Rain in a tone of deep emotion, as he gazed with peculiar—almost scrutinising attention upon the Earl's countenance,—
"no other man on earth would thus have dared to stop me with impunity. As for explanations," he continued, his voice suddenly assuming a little of its usual reckless indifference, "I have none to give."

And again he moved towards the door.

But Lord Ellingham hastened to place his back against it in a determined manner: while Rainford, as if discouraged and daunted, fell back a few paces.

"Mr. Rainford," exclaimed the Earl, "this matter cannot pass off thus. I insist upon an explana—"

tion; or I shall consider it to be my duty to detain you until Lady Hatfield be sufficiently recovered to declare the nature of the treatment she has experienced at your hands. Moreover, sir," added the nobleman, observing that Rainford's lip blanched and quivered nervously, "you are to a certain degree an object of suspicion in my eyes. A variety of circumstances have combined to prove to me that you were implicated, to some degree, in the theft of diamonds which lately caused so much embarrassment at the police-court."

"My lord, that business does not regard you," replied the highwayman. "The diamonds were restored to their lawful owner; and—more than that—I even ascertained from Mr. Gordon's own lips that they were paid for, before their restoration, by one who—But let me depart, my lord, I say!" ejaculated Tom, his manner suddenly changing from nervous trepidation to the excitement of impatience.

"You must remain here, sir," said Arthur coldly, "until we ascertain whether it be Lady Hatfield's pleasure that your detention should assume a more serious aspect."

"Allow me to pass, my dear Earl," exclaimed Sir Ralph; "and I will hasten to ascertain how my niece is now, and what her intentions are with respect to this person."

Rainford paced the room in an agitated manner, while Lord Ellingham afforded egress to the baronet, and then resumed his position of sentinel with his back placed against the door.

"My lord," at length said the highwayman, advancing close up to the Earl, and speaking in a low, oppressed tone, "you will find that her ladyship has no complaint to make against me. Permit me to take my departure; and again I tell you that of no other living soul would I solicit as a favour what I would command by force."

"I cannot allow you to leave this room—at least until the return of Sir Ralph Walsingham," answered the Earl. "Lady Hatfield must have been insulted or menaced by you in some way—"

"I take God to witness that I neither insulted nor menaced her!" interrupted Rainford, warmly.

"If your liberty be endangered," said the nobleman, "it is well worth a falsehood to attempt to avert the peril."

"My God! this from *him*!" muttered Rainford bitterly to himself, as he once more turned round to pace the room: then, at the expiration of a minute, he said in a calmer tone, "Well, my lord—I am content to wait until the decision of her ladyship is made known in respect to me. And since it appears that we shall have a few moments more of each other's society, permit me to ask,—your lordship having just now alluded to a certain transaction at a police-court,—permit me to ask, I say, whether you really believe that Miss Esther de Medina was innocent or guilty of the charge imputed to her?"

"This is rather a singular question—coming from you, Mr. Rainford!" exclaimed the Earl; "and before I answer it, allow me to ask whether it was not you who left a certain letter at my house, declaring me to repair to the police-office on that occasion?"

"I will not deny the fact, my lord," replied Rainford. "Indeed, I did not particularly study concealment respecting it—else would I not have af-

forded your lordship's servants an opportunity of describing to you the personal appearance of the individual who left that letter. But if your lordship entertains even the shadow of a suspicion injurious to the character of Miss de Medina, you are wrong—you are in error!—yes—as grievously in error as ever mistaken man could be. Besides, my lord," added Rainford hastily, "you are well aware that the *alibi* which your lordship proved was correct."

"And how knew you that Miss de Medina was with her father and myself at Finchley on the very day, and at the very hour, when the diamonds were alleged to have been taken?" demanded the Earl.

"It would be useless to pretend that accident gave me the information," answered Tom Rain. "But think not that *she* employed *me* as an agent or as a messenger to obtain the intervention of your lordship—"

"Mr. Rainford," said the Earl haughtily, "I dislike the present conversation. I have the highest opinion of Mr. de Medina, and should be sorry to think ill of any one connected with him. But I must candidly confess that there is so much mystery respecting the character of his daughter—a mystery, too, existing on account of yourself, for which reason alone do I condescend to discuss with you any affair relating to Mr. de Medina or his family—"

"Lord Ellingham," interrupted Rainford in a hasty and impetuous tone, "Esther de Medina is the very personification of innocence and virtue! As God is my judge, she was ignorant of my interference in her behalf on that day when she was accused of a deed from which her pure soul would recoil with horror:—she knew not even that I was in the court—"

"And yet you were there, Mr. Rainford," exclaimed the Earl: "for I noticed you—although at the time I knew not who you were."

"But Miss de Medina was *not* aware of my presence," rejoined Rainford emphatically; "*for she does not know me by sight!*"

A smile of incredulity curled the nobleman's lip—for the oath which Mr. de Medina had administered to his daughter, and in which her connexion with Rainford was so emphatically mentioned, was uppermost in his mind. But he dared not allude to that circumstance; although he would have been truly rejoiced to receive the conviction that Esther was indeed far different from what he was at present compelled to believe her to be.

"Your lordship said ere now," resumed Tom Rain, "that you noticed me in the court, although at the time you knew not who I was. Those were your words. Does your lordship now know who I am?"

"I cannot boast of a very intimate acquaintance with you or your affairs, Mr. Rainford," returned the nobleman with a hauteur bordering on contempt; "and what I do know of you is so little in your favour that you see I am detaining you here on the suspicion that your visit to Lady Hatfield was for no good purpose. In fact, the first I ever heard of you was in reference to the charge on account of which you yourself figured at Bow Street some short time since,—a charge of which, I am bound to say, you were honourably acquitted, Lady Hatfield having satisfactorily proved that you were not the person who robbed her on the highway."

"Thus far, my lord," said Rainford, "you have no just ground to speak disparagingly of my character."

"Certainly not. But then comes the affair of the diamonds; and I do not hesitate to inform you that Mr. Gordon related to me all the particulars of your interview with him, when you called to restore the jewels, and when he made you aware of the fact that Miss de Medina had already been to pay him the full value thereof."

"Ah! Mr. Gordon was thus communicative?" observed Rainford.

"Yes—and not sparing of his aspersions against the character of Miss de Medina," returned the Earl. "But I defended her, Mr. Rainford—I defended her *then*—"

"And wherefore should you not defend her now, my lord?" demanded the highwayman. "Oh! were I to reveal to you by what wondrous combination of circumstances—But, no! I dare not. And yet, my lord," he added in an earnest, solemn tone, "you are an upright—a generous-hearted man; and I appeal to your good feelings—I implore you not to trust to outward appearances. As there is a God above, Esther de Medina is innocent of every thing—any thing that scandal or misconception may have imputed to her. Again you smile incredulously—and yet mournfully, my lord! Ah! I can assure you, that Esther is innocent—oh! believe her to be innocent!"

At this moment footsteps were heard approaching the door, which Lord Ellingham accordingly opened; and Sir Ralph Walsingham re-appeared.

"How is Georgiana now?" inquired the nobleman hastily.

"My niece is ill—very ill," returned the baronet.

"Ill!" ejaculated Arthur. "Ah! villain—this is your work!" he cried, rushing towards the highwayman.

"Keep off!" thundered Rainford: "you know not whom you would strike!"

"No—touch him not!" cried Sir Ralph, catching the Earl by the arm, and holding him back. "I have seen my niece—Dr. Lascelles is now alone with her: she is more composed—though very far from well;—and she begs that this person may be allowed to depart without the slightest molestation."

"Her ladyship shall be obeyed, Sir Ralph," returned the nobleman. "Mr. Rainford, you have heard the message that has been sent relative to yourself."

Having thus spoken, Arthur turned aside;—for a strange misgiving—a vague suspicion—no, not a suspicion either,—but a feeling of dissatisfaction had stolen into his mind. If Rainford had alarmed or insulted Lady Hatfield, wherefore should she allow him to go unpunished? Was it not more probable that he had brought her some evil tidings? But how could there exist any connexion, however remote or slight, between that man of equivocal character and Georgiana Hatfield? What business could possibly bring them together, and produce so strange—so powerful an impression upon her?

All these ideas rushed to the Earl's mind in rapid and bewildering succession; and the reader need not be astonished if we repeat that a sentiment of dissatisfaction—almost amounting to a vague suspicion, but of what he knew not—had suddenly taken a firm hold of his imagination.

Who was this Rainford, after all? Was he other than he seemed? Could he be in any way connected with that narrative of the Black Mask when the Earl supposed to have partially affected his Georgiana's mind, and which he looked upon as the cause of that apparent fickleness or caprice which had first led her to refuse his proffered hand? The more he involved himself in conjecture, the deeper did he plunge into a labyrinth which grew darker and more bewildering at every step.

When he turned round again towards the place where he had left Rainford standing, that individual was gone; and the nobleman was alone with Sir Ralph Walsingham.

"You have seen Georgiana?" said Arthur, advancing towards the baronet and grasping his hand with the convulsive violence of deep emotion.

"I have, my dear Earl; and she appears as if she had received some severe shock," was the reply.

"What, in the name of God! does all this mean?" exclaimed the nobleman, with wildness in his tone.

"I know not—I cannot comprehend it," answered the uncle, as much bewildered as the lover.

"But did you not question your niece? did she offer no explanation? did she not state the cause of her emotion—that piercing scream—that fainting—that movement of horror when she recovered?" demanded the Earl, impatiently.

"I questioned her; but, perceiving that it only augmented her agitation, I did not press a painful interrogatory," replied Sir Ralph. "When I informed her that you had detained that man, whom I heard you address by the name of Rainford, and whom I therefore supposed to have been the person suspected of robbing my niece,—when I informed her that you had detained him, I say, she was greatly excited, and desired me to hasten and request you to allow him to depart immediately, as she had no cause of complaint against him."

"Strange!—most strange!" murmured the Earl.

"Have patience, my dear Arthur," said Sir Ralph. "To-morrow Georgiana will be better; and then she will doubtless explain—"

"To-morrow—to-morrow!" repeated the nobleman impatiently. "Oh! what suspense—what terrible suspense! Ah! Sir Ralph, you know not how wretchedly will pass the weary hours of this night! If I could but see her—only for a moment! Would it be indiscreet? Dear Sir Ralph, have pity upon me, and ask Lascelles to come and speak to me."

The baronet, who was a kind-hearted man, instantly departed to execute this commission; and in a few minutes he returned, accompanied by the physician.

To the latter the Earl repeated the same question which he had already addressed to Sir Ralph Walsingham:—"What, in the name of God! does all this mean?"

And the Doctor gave almost a similar reply:—"I know not—I cannot understand it."

But there was less sincerity in this answer as given by Lascelles than there was in the same response as uttered from the heart by the frank and honest baronet:—for the physician *had* his suspicions relative to the mysterious connexion which now appeared to subsist between Lady Hatfield and the individual whose visit had caused so much painful excitement.

"That villain Rainford! I am sorry even now

that I suffered him to escape!" ejaculated the Earl, scarcely knowing how to act or speak.

"Rainford!" cried the physician. "Why, that is the name of the man who was taken up on suspicion of having robbed her ladyship near Hounslow!"

"And that was Thomas Rainford who was here ere now!" returned Arthur, with bitter emphasis, as if he hated the name.

"Rainford!" repeated the physician, in astonishment. "I thought that man's name was Jameson?"

The reader will remember that such was the denomination under which the highwayman passed when residing in South Moulton Street.

"What! do you know him?" demanded the Earl, gazing upon the doctor with unfeigned surprise.

"I once attended a patient at his abode," was the laconic reply: for Lascelles remembered the solemn promise which he had made to Tom Rain on that occasion.

"And where did he live?" inquired Arthur, eagerly. "I may wish to see that man again."

"Where he lived then, he does not live now," returned the physician; "for he moved away the very next day after I was called in; and whither he went to, the people of the house knew not."

"I believe him to be a man of bad character," observed Arthur hastily. "But enough of him—at least for the present. Doctor, can I be permitted to see Lady Hatfield for a few minutes?"

"Impossible for to-night, my dear Earl," replied the physician. "Her ladyship is in a state of nervous agitation—feverish excitement, indeed,—and must not be disturbed. Her maids are now with her, and she is about to retire to rest. To-morrow, my dear Ellingham, you shall see her—that is, provided she is more composed."

"Then must I submit to this weary night of suspense!" exclaimed the young nobleman. "But to-morrow, Doctor, I may see her. You have promised that I shall see her to-morrow! My visit will be somewhat early. Will it be indiscreet if I call at eleven?"

"Call at eleven, then," returned the physician, smiling at his friend's impatience. "But I think I ought to administer a composing draught to you."

The Earl and Sir Ralph Walsingham shook hands with Dr. Lascelles, and took their departure. The other guests had already gone; but the physician remained behind to see his fair patient once more ere he returned home.

When Lascelles found himself alone in the apartment which the young nobleman and the baronet had just left, he fell into a train of reflection which, like the Earl's state of mind, was strangely characterised by perplexity. Were the Doctor's thoughts put into words, they would assume as nearly as possible the ensuing shape:—

"Well, this is an evening of unpleasant adventure! That Jameson, or Rainford, or whatever his name is, has brought confusion and dismay into the house. Perplexities increase rapidly. I remember all that Ellingham said to me the day that he called to inform me that he was the happiest of men, and that her ladyship had accepted him. He declared then that he knew all—that he would never allow what must be considered a misfortune to stand in the way of his happiness—and so on. I also remem-

ber complimenting him on his moral courage in rising superior to a common prejudice; and then we dropped the conversation because we agreed that it was a delicate subject. And so it was, too: a devilish delicate subject! And I had found out the grand secret by stealth! Ah! the effects of that opiate were powerful, and she has never suspected that I *did* find out the secret. But Ellingham scarcely seems to have his wits about him; or else he *must* suspect the object of this Rainford's visit. It's as clear as daylight! Rainford is the man—and now he wants to extort money from her ladyship. But Ellingham cannot put two and two together as I can:—and the physician rubbed his hands complacently, little suspecting that his sapient conjecture relative to the object of the highwayman's visit was totally wrong, as the reader is aware.—"Thus Rainford is an extraordinary character; and I do believe that he really robbed her ladyship, but that she did not dare say so in the police-court. He has the cut of a dashing fellow who would as soon rifle a pocket as drink a bumper of wine. Curse him, for having intruded on the mysteries of my laboratory! Oh! if Ellingham only knew what I know about the beautiful Esther de Medina—the charming Jewess! What deceivers some women are! To look on Esther, one would think she was purity itself? And yet——"

The physician's reverie was interrupted by the entrance of a female servant, who came to inform him that Lady Hatfield had retired to her bed, and that the Doctor might now visit her again. He accordingly repaired to her chamber, and having prescribed some composing medicine, took his departure, without once alluding to the incidents of the evening; for he was anxious that Georgiana's mind should remain as free from causes of excitement and agitation as possible.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MR. FRANK CURTIS AGAIN.

IN the meantime, Thomas Rainford had quitted the abode of Lady Hatfield with a heavy heart: for the duty which he had felt himself called upon to perform, in making a particular statement to Georgiana, had pained—acutely pained his generous soul.

He had not proceeded many yards from that lady's dwelling, when he suddenly encountered Mr. Frank Curtis; and as at that precise moment the glare of a lamp streamed full upon Rainford's countenance, he was immediately recognised by that impertinent young gentleman.

"Ah! Captain Sparks!" ejaculated Frank: "so we meet again, do we? Well, it's very fortunate that I did *not* accept my friend the Duke's invitation to his select dinner-party; or else I should have missed this pleasure. Now what is to prevent me from collaring you, my fine fellow, and raising a hue and cry?"

"*Fear*, Mr. Curtis—*fear* will prevent you," returned Tom Rain, recovering all his wonted presence of mind: and, taking the young man's arm, he said, "Walk a little way with me. I want to have a few minutes' chat with you. Here—put your hand on my great coat pocket: that's right! Now you can feel a pistol inside—eh? Well its companion is in the other pocket; and you must

know enough of me already, to be fully aware that any treachery on your part would meet with its reward; for I would shoot you in the open street, if you attempted to place my liberty in danger."

"I'm sure I—I do n't want to injure you, Captain Sparks," stammered Frank, trembling from head to foot as he walked along, arm-in-arm with the highwayman. "I always took you for a capital fellow—and I should very much like to drink a bottle of wine with you. What do you say? Shall we go into the Gloucester, or Hatchett's—"

"Neither one nor the other, Mr. Curtis," interrupted Rainford. "I thank you for your civility all the same."

"Oh! it's nothing, Captain. I learnt politeness in France, where, to be sure, I had excellent—I may say peculiar advantages. The King was very much attached to me—and as for the ladies of the Court—Oh! do n't ask me to speak about them, Captain Sparks!"

"Indeed I will not," returned Tom dily. "I want you to let me know how your uncle gets on. Does he still remember that pleasant little adventure—ha! ha!"—and the highwayman's merry laugh denoted that his spirits were reviving once more.

"Sir Christopher! Oh! the old fool—do n't talk to me about him!" ejaculated Frank Curtis. "I have done with my uncle—I shall cut him—I can never speak to him again, Captain Sparks. He has disgraced himself—disgraced his family, which was a very ancient one—"

"I always thought Sir Christopher made a boast of having risen from nothing?" said Tom ironically.

"Ah! so he did. But that was only a part of his system of gammoning people," continued Frank. "His family was originally the celebrated Blondes of France: about three thousand years ago they settled in Scotland, and their name was corrupted to *Blundevil*;—then a branch came to England about fifteen hundred years ago, and in process of time they spelt their name with a *t*—*Bluntvil*. At last the *e* was left out, and it became *Bluntvil*; and God only knows why, but three hundred and seventy-seven years ago, come next Michaelmas, the *vil* was dropped, and the name settled down into simple *Blunt*. So you see, Captain, that Sir Christopher is of a good family after all."

"Why do n't you try and get a situation in the Herald's College?" demanded Rainford. "You would be able to find pedigrees for all the Browns, Jones's, Thompsons, and Smiths in the country."

"Come—come, Captain Sparks," exclaimed Frank: "this observation isn't fair on your part. I may have my faults—I know I have; but I do n't shoot with the long bow. I hate that kind of thing!"

"But let us return to the subject of your uncle Sir Christopher," said Tom. "What has he been doing?"

"Run away with a lady's-maid—gone to Gretna with Lady Hatfield's female servant Charlotte!" cried Frank, with great bitterness of tone. "The damned old fool!—but I'll cut him—cut him dead—and that's some consolation."

"Gone to Gretna with Lady Hatfield's maid!" exclaimed Rainford.

"Maid, indeed! I hope he'll find her so!" said

Curtis. "The hussey! But I'll be even with her yet!"

"And when did this happen?" inquired Tom.

"Oh! only a few days ago. They are not come back yet. I dare say Sir Christopher already repents his bargain. But I'll cut him!"

"I'm afraid if you cut his acquaintance, he'll cut off your supplies," observed Rainford jocosely.

"And what does that matter?" ejaculated Frank. "Do you think there are no rich women in London that would be glad to have a decent-looking fellow like myself. Egad! I've already got introduced to a widow as wealthy as if her late husband had been a Nabob. It's true that she's blest with five pledges of the said late husband's affection; but then she's got five thousand a-year—and one five is a good set-off against the other, Captain Sparks. Rather so—eh? old fellow?"

"Well, I think it is," returned the highwayman. "But how did all this happen about Sir Christopher and the lady's-maid?"

"I'll tell you," answered Curtis. "You see, Sir Christopher was going to run away with Miss Mordaunt, Lady Hatfield's friend, and I found it out in one of my clever ways. So I resolved to baulk Sir Christopher; and I bribed this lady's-maid Charlotte—in fact, I gave her five hundred pounds and a gold watch, the hussey!—to go to the appointment, get into the carriage, personate Miss Julia Mordaunt, and keep up the farce until they got to St. Alban's, where me and a parcel of my friends were to be at the inn to receive them. That was to be the joke."

"And how did the joke turn so completely against yourself?" asked Tom.

"Why, me and my friends waited—and waited—and waited at the infernal hotel at St. Alban's; and no Sir Christopher—no Charlotte came. We had a glorious supper, and made a regular night of it. All next day we waited—and waited again; but no Sir Christopher—no Charlotte. '*What the devil can this mean?*' thought I to myself. So I came up to London, leaving my friends at the inn at St. Alban's in pawn for the bill—for somehow or another none of us had money enough about us to settle it. Well, when I came back to town, I went home: that is, you know, to my uncle's house in Jermyn Street; and there I found a letter that had just come for me by the post. It was written from some town a good way north, and was from Sir Christopher. I began to think something was wrong; and sure enough there was! For, when I opened the letter, I found that my silly old uncle had written to thank me for throwing in his way a delightful and most amiable woman, who had consented to take his name and share his fortune. The letter went on to say that they were then pretty far on their road to Gretna, and that as they should stop at St. Alban's *as they came back*, I might be there, if I chose, to have the pleasure of handing my *awnt* out of the carriage. That was all said to irritate me, you know, Captain Sparks; and most likely that vixen Charlotte made Sir Christopher write the letter just to annoy me. But I'll cut them both dead: and we shall see what my precious *awnt*—for such she is by this time, I suppose—will say *then*!"

"This is really a very pleasant little adventure," cried Tom Rain. "But I think you carried your joke too far, Mr. Curtis; and so it has recoiled on yourself. Have you seen Mr. Torrens lately?"

"Not I!" exclaimed Curtis. "But don't you confess, Captain, that you earned matters a trifle too far that night? Never mind the two thousand pounds: I'm glad my old hunks of an uncle has lost *that*! But I allude to the affair of helping the gals to run away. I suppose you were in league with Villiers all the time?"

"What makes you think that Villiers had anything to do with the matter?" inquired Rainford.

"Simply because I don't imagine you carried off the gals for your own sake. However," continued Frank, "I care but little about the matter now. I certainly liked Adela's very much at the time; but there are plenty of others in the world quite as handsome. Besides, I now see through all Sir Christopher's trickery in wanting me to marry Miss Torrens in such a deuce of a hurry, and in giving me a separate establishment. The old bird wanted to commit matrimony himself; and I should have been poked off with a few paltry hundreds a-year."

"And so you will now," said Tom. "Or matters may be even worse, after the trick you endeavoured to play upon your uncle."

"Not a bit of it!" cried Frank. "Had old Blunt's scheme succeeded, I should have been married to a portionless gal, and forced to live on whatever he chose to give me. Now that his project has failed, I am free and unshackled, and can secure myself a position by marriage. I might even look as high as my friend the Duke's niece; but she is horribly ill-tempered, and so I think of making an offer of my heart and hand—I *can* do the thing well if I like, you know, Captain—to Mrs. Goldberry, the widow I spoke of just now."

"The name sounds well, I confess," observed Tom. "But did your uncle never—I mean, did he not instruct his lawyer to adopt any proceedings about that little affair of the two thousand pounds?"

"Not he, Captain!" exclaimed Frank Curtis. "As far as my uncle is concerned, you may rest quite satisfied that he will never take any notice of the business: and Howard wouldn't act without his instructions."

They had now reached Charing Cross; and Tom Rain, having had quite enough of Mr. Curtis's company, signified his desire that they should separate.

"You won't pass an hour with me over a bottle of wine?" said the young man. "I really should like to have a chat with such a gallant, dashing fellow as you are, Captain; for you're quite after my own heart—barring the——"

"The highway business—eh?" cried Tom, laughing. "Why, you cannot for a minute suppose that it is my regular profession, Mr. Curtis? No such a thing! I merely eased you of the two thousand pounds for the joke of it—just as you played off your tricks on Sir Christopher."

"You talk about easing me, Captain," returned Frank; "but I can assure you that you're the first man that ever got the better of me. Don't fancy for a moment that I—I'm a coward, Captain Sparks——"

"Far from it, my dear sir," exclaimed Tom. "I know you to be as brave as you are straight-forward in your conversation. So good night—and pray take care not to follow me; for I've an awkward habit of turning round and knocking on the head any one that I imagine to be watching me."

With these words the highwayman hurried off up the Strand: and Frank Curtis entered a cigar shop, muttering to himself, "Damn the fellow! I almost think he meant that for insolence. Egad! if he *do*, the next time I meet him——"

But the valiant young gentleman did not precisely make up his mind what he should do, in the case supposed: and any resentment which he experienced, speedily evaporated with the soothing influence of a cheroot.

Meantime Tom Rain pursued his way along the Strand and Fleet Street, and repaired to the lodgings of Mr. Clarence Villiers in Bridge Street.

That gentleman was at home, and received his visitor in a very friendly manner.

"You are most welcome, Captain Sparks," he said; "and the more so if you intend to pass an hour or two with me; for my aunt is so very particular that she *would* take the girls to church with her this evening; but of course I did not offer to accompany them, as I could not wear a veil over my face, you know," he added, laughing; "and were I recognised by Mr. Torrens or any of his friends, attention would be immediately directed to any ladies who might happen to be in my company. So I shall not visit Old Burlington Street this evening; and if you will bear me company over a bottle of wine——"

"I cannot possibly remain many minutes," interrupted Rainford. "In fact I am going to leave England very shortly——"

"Leave England!" ejaculated Clarence. "I am truly sorry to hear that announcement—just as we begin to get friendly together."

"Circumstances compel me to take this step," answered Rainford; "and my time for preparation is short. I have called to-night upon business—for, in a word, you can do me a service, perhaps, if you will."

"As if there were any doubt relative to my inclination, provided I have the power," exclaimed Clarence, who was busily employed in decanting a bottle of port-wine: then, having placed upon the table two glasses, which he filled, he said, "You know, Captain Sparks, that I am under the greatest obligation to you. Through your kind—your generous intervention, Adela's will be mine. The banns were published at St. George's, Hanover Square, a second time to-day; and to-morrow week we shall be united. The bridal breakfast will take place at my aunt's: shall we not have the pleasure of your company? Pray, do not refuse me."

"It is impossible—much as I should rejoice at being the witness of that union which no severe or mercenary father will be able to subvert," said Rainford in a feeling tone. "My affairs compel me to leave this country—at least for a time; and for that reason I am anxious to place in your hands a certain document, the mystery of which some accident might probably lead you to clear up."

Rainford then produced the letter which had been found about the person of the deceased Sarah Watts, and which he now requested Villiers to peruse.

"You observe that there is no address to indicate the name of the lady to whom that letter was written," continued the highwayman, when Clarence had read it with attention. "The child to whom it refers is now in my care: accident threw him in my way—and his adopted mother, who was the writer of that letter, is no more."



"Will the child accompany you?" asked Villiers.

"He will. But I will write to you the moment I reach America—to which country I am going—and let you know my address, or at all events through what channel a letter will come direct to me. Then, should you have made any discovery—which is however scarcely to be expected—still, as a wise precaution, I have adopted this step—"

"You are right, Captain," said Villiers; "and I shall not forget the trust you have now confided to me. Should anything transpire respecting this matter, I will not fail to communicate with you. But will you not pass one evening with me in the society of my aunt and the two young ladies, who will all be delighted to receive you? Mrs. Slingsby is a most amiable and excellent woman—"

"A little of a saint—is she not?" exclaimed the highwayman drily.

"She is certainly of a religious turn of mind—indeed, I may say, enthusiastically so," answered Villiers. "But she is extremely charitable—and her benevolence embraces a very wide circle."

"I believe she is a handsome woman, too?" observed Tom Rain.

"She is possessed of personal as well as mental attractions, Captain Sparks," responded Villiers seriously. "But, when in her society, you would think of her only as the pious—benevolent—and compassionate woman, whose heart is ever ready to sympathise with the woes of her fellow creatures."

"To speak candidly, Mr. Villiers," said Rainford, "I am no friend to the *saints*. It may be a prejudice on my part—but I can't help it. Excuse me for my frankness—I beg of you to take it in good part: still I always think that the stillest water runs deepest; and I would not—"

"Remember, Captain Sparks," interrupted Villiers, somewhat warmly, "that you are speaking of my aunt, who is a most worthy and estimable woman. Deeply as I am indebted to you—much as I am inclined to esteem you—yet—"

"I understand you, my dear Mr. Villiers," cried Tom: "you cannot permit me to breathe even a suspicion against Mrs. Slingsby in your presence. Well—I know that it is most ungracious on my part: still, as I was more or less instrumental in inducing those too artless, confiding young ladies

to quit their father's home—to abandon the paternal dwelling—

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" ejaculated Clarence, now seriously alarmed. "I see that there is something at the bottom of all this! Captain Sparks, I implore you to explain yourself. You are evidently well-intentioned—you have shown the greatest friendship for me—I reciprocate the feeling most cordially: fear not, then, to speak."

"My dear Villiers," answered the highwayman, "how can I enter upon particulars the narration of which would be most painful for you to hear? And yet I should not be acting consistently with my duty towards those young ladies—no, nor towards yourself who are about to make one of them your wife—"

"Hesitate not: speak freely!" exclaimed Clarence, seeing that his companion paused. "Should the breath of scandal have wafted to your ear anything prejudicial to the character of my aunt, I cannot blame your motive in confiding the fact to me. And I the more earnestly solicit you to be frank and candid—that is, to act consistently with your nature, which is all frankness and candour,—and reveal to me the cause of this distrust—this want of confidence relative to Mrs. Slingsby,—because I have no doubt of being able to convince you that you have been misled."

"And should I succeed in convincing you to the contrary?" asked Rainford.

"Then I should say that you had indeed performed the part of a friend," replied Villiers emphatically. "Although I know beforehand that such a result is impossible—yet, for your complete satisfaction, do I declare that should you prove my aunt to be in any way an unsuitable guardian for that dear girl Adelaïs, and her sister, I shall conceive it to be my duty immediately to seek for them another home—yes, another home—even for the few days that remain to be passed ere I shall acquire a right to protect Adelaïs as her husband and Rosamond as her brother."

"You have spoken well and wisely, Villiers," said Rainford; "but I do not recommend any extreme measure, which might only irritate your aunt, and perhaps lead to the forced restoration of the young ladies to their father before you can have obtained the right you speak of. I merely wish you to be on your guard—"

"But the grounds of your suspicion, Captain?" cried Clarence impatiently. "Pardon my interruption—and pity my suspense."

"I do both," returned the highwayman. "And now remember that I am no mischief-maker between relations or friends; and were it not for the peculiar circumstances of this case, in which two innocent young ladies are concerned, I should never have thought it worth while to utter a word of any thing I know injurious to Mrs. Slingsby's character—no, not even to unmask the most disgusting hypocrisy," added Rainford warmly.

"Do you still allude to my aunt?" demanded Clarence, colouring with indignation.

"I do. But start not—I am not seeking a quarrel with you, Villiers—and you promised to listen patiently."

"To no other living being should I have listened so patiently as I have already done to you," said Clarence. "But pray let us hasten to dispose of so disagreeable a topic in one way or the other."

"I am most anxious to do so," continued the highwayman. "Do you know Sir Henry Courtenay?"

"Certainly: he is my aunt's best friend."

"And her lover," added Rainford coolly.

Villiers started from his seat, exclaiming, "Captain Sparks! you presume upon the obligation which I owe you, to calumniate—"

"Then good evening, Mr. Villiers," interrupted the highwayman. "If this is the fair and impartial hearing which you promised to give me,—if this is the manner in which you treat one who has not—cannot have an improper motive in offering you wise counsel—"

"Stay, my dear friend—stay!" exclaimed Clarence, actually thrusting Rainford back into his seat; "and pray forgive my impetuosity. But this accusation—so sudden—so unexpected—so very strange—"

"And yet it is substantially true," added Rainford emphatically: "and it is proper that you should know it. For my part, I am not the man to blame Mrs. Slingsby for having a lover—nor yet the lover for having her as his mistress: it's human nature both ways. But when I know that she has been entrusted by you with the guardianship of two young ladies of tender age and spotless innocence, and one of whom is so very, very dear to you, I consider it necessary for you to be enlightened as to her true character. I've no doubt that you must feel deeply this communication: but it is better for you to learn that your aunt is something that she ought not to be, than to find out when it is too late that your wife or her sister have been corrupted by bad example."

Clarence paced the room in an agitated manner: then, at the expiration of a few minutes, he turned suddenly, exclaiming, "Not for a moment, Captain Sparks, do I suspect you of any sinister object: but you will pardon me for soliciting the proof of this charge which, if substantiated, must so completely and so painfully change my opinion of a relative whom I have until now vaunted as the pattern of virtue and propriety."

"The mode of proving the charge may be left to yourself," replied the highwayman. "Did you ever hear the circumstance of your aunt's house being robbed by a boy to whom she gave a night's lodging, some four or five years ago?"

"Certainly," exclaimed Villiers. "I recollect the incident well. Mrs. Slingsby herself communicated it to me. The ungrateful young villain—"

"I know that boy," interrupted Tom Rain drily; "and I am convinced that he told me the truth when he declared that, during the night—or rather the portion of the night, which he passed in Mrs. Slingsby's house, accident made him a witness to a scene which leaves no doubt as to the fact that Sir Henry Courtenay and Mrs. Slingsby are as intimate as man and wife together."

"And would you receive the testimony of a thief—"

"When well corroborated," added the highwayman.

"But how happened it that you should have any connexion with this lad, Captain Sparks!" demanded Clarence, in a cold and suspicious tone.

"Suppose that the boy has repented of his errors—that he has merited my interest by a service

which accident enabled him to render me—that he related to me his entire history, in which this incident is comprised—and that, on questioning him closely, I learnt that the occurrence took place at the residence of your aunt?”

“I am bewildered—amazed—grieved—profoundly grieved!” ejaculated Villiers. “To suppose for an instant that this kind and affectionate relative—who has always been so good to me, and through whose bounty I am enabled to prepare and fit up a suitable dwelling for the reception of my beloved Adelaïs,—to think that this much-respected and long-cherished woman should conceal the greatest profligacy beneath the mask of charity and religion—oh! it is a cruel blow!”

“Again I say that the mode of proving the charge may be left to yourself,” observed Rainford. “Seek an opportunity to be alone with Mrs. Slingsby—make some pointed allusion to the incident—and mark how she receives it.”

“I will call at my aunt’s residence to-morrow morning early—the very first thing,” exclaimed Villiers. “The whole affair is most serious; and, now that I can at length contemplate it with something bordering on calmness, I am bound to confess—But let us quit the topic,” he added, in a tone of deep vexation, in spite of his asserted self-possession.

“And you bear me no ill-will for the course I have pursued?” said Rainford.

“Far from it. You have acted in a most friendly manner—whatever the result may be!” cried Villiers, grasping the highwayman’s hand most cordially.

“I have performed a very painful duty,” rejoined Tom: “and now I must take my leave of you—perhaps for a long, long time—if not for ever.”

“Farewell,” said Clarence; “and may prosperity attend you in another clime.”

“Farewell,” replied Rainford; “and may you be happy with your Adelaïs.”

The highwayman then hurried from the room, considerably affected by this parting from one for whom he already experienced a most sincere regard.

Nor was Villiers unmoved by this farewell scene; for, on his side, he was particularly attached to the individual who had not only rendered him so essential a service on that memorable night which first made them acquainted with each other, but whose apparent frankness of disposition and manliness of character were well calculated to engage the good opinion of the confiding, warm-hearted, and unsuspecting Clarence.

CHAPTER XLV.

MR. DYKES AND HIS MYRMIDONS.

It was midnight; and profound silence reigned throughout the region of Lock’s fields.

But suddenly that silence was broken by the tread of several persons, who emerged from a by-alley in the immediate vicinity of Brandon Street.

At the corner of this street they paused to hold a hasty conference.

They were six in number—five men and a woman.

“This is the street,” said the woman.

“Oh! this is it, Mrs. Bunce—eh?” returned Mr. Dykes, the Bow Street officer, rubbing his nose

with the knob of his stout ash-stick, while his countenance, on which the bright moon-beams played, showed an expression of calm determination.

“Yes: and that’s the house—there: the ninth on t’ other side of the way,” added Mrs. Bunce.

“Well—now we don’t want you no more, ma’am,” said Dykes; “’cos women is all very well in their place; and darling creatur’s they are too. But when a grab is to be made, they’re best at home, a-bed and asleep. So good night to you, ma’am.”

“Good night, gentlemen all,” responded Mrs. Bunce; and she hurried away.

“Now, Bingham and you fellers,” said Mr. Dykes, “we must munda what we’re up to; for we shan’t catch a weazel asleep. You, Bingham, take one of the runners and get round to the back of the house. Me and t’ other chaps will make the entry in front. But we shan’t stir a peg for one quarter of an hour; and by that time you’ll be at your post.”

“All right,” returned Mr. Bingham; and this individual accordingly moved off, followed by one of the subordinate runners.

In the meantime, Tom Rainford was sleeping, not dreaming of danger, in the arms of the beautiful Jewess.

Charley Watts was cradled in a little bed made up for him in the warmest corner of the room.

A light burnt in the apartment, where naught was heard save the slow, regular breathing of the sleepers.

The clear, transparent olive complexion of the beautiful Jewess contrasted strongly with the florid countenance of the highwayman; and the commingling of the raven hair of the one with the light, almost yellow locks of the other, produced a strange effect, as the marked discrepancy of hues was set off by the snowy whiteness of the pillow. By the feeble light of the candle, it appeared as if ebony and gold were blending on a white ground.

But, hark! what is that sound which breaks on the silence of the chamber?—and wherefore does the highwayman start from his sleep?

He awakes—and listens.

The Jewess also awakes—and also listens,—one of her beautifully modelled arms thrown around the neck of him whom she loved so fondly.

“Some one is trying the back-door,” whispered Rainford at length; and he leapt from the bed.

In less than a minute he had thrown on his clothes; and grasping his pistols, he hastened to the window.

But at the same instant the back-door was forced in;—more violently, no doubt, than Bingham and his co-operator had intended; and the sound was too unequivocal to permit Tom Rain to doubt the meaning of the disturbance.

Returning to the bed, he said in a hurried but solemn and deeply impressive tone, “Dearest, I am betrayed. If I escape, you shall soon hear from me: if I am captured, I charge you—by all the love I bear for you—by all the love you bear for me—not to attempt to visit me in prison! Farewell—dearest, dearest girl!”

He embraced her fondly—affectionately,—oh! most lovingly; while she sobbed as if her heart would break.

Then in a moment he tore himself away:—foot steps—many footsteps were already ascending—nay, rushing up—the stairs.

He darted from the room, sprang up a ladder

which stood on the landing—pushed up a trap-door—and in another moment was on the roof of the house.

The officers were close upon him. Dykes and his two men had effected an entry by the front-door of the house almost at the same moment that Bingham and his follower had broken in at the back; and the entire posse reached the landing just at the moment that the trap-door fell down heavily into its place.

"He has escaped by the roof!" cried Dykes. "Bingham, my boy, take a couple of chaps, and watch the backs of the houses: he can't get away by the front—it's too high for him to leap into the street. Me and t' other chap will after him to the tilings."

Thus saying, Dykes ascended the ladder as quickly as his unwieldy form would permit. The trap-door was easily raised, as it only fastened inside; and the portly body of the Bow Street officer, who possessed more courage than alacrity, was forced through the small aperture. The operation was slow and difficult; but at last Mr. Dykes stood on a narrow ledge which ran along the whole row of houses, and from which the roof rose obliquely behind. This ledge was only protected by a parapet about two feet high; and the officer felt his position to be any thing but a safe one.

But he was not the man to shrink from danger.

"Come along, you feller," he cried out to his follower, who speedily emerged from the opening. "You cut along that way, and I'll go this."

And they proceeded in different directions on the roof of the house.

The moon shone brightly, but Thomas Rainford was not to be seen.

Suddenly an exclamation of triumph burst from the yard at the back of one of the adjacent houses.

"Holloa?" vociferated Dykes, from the eminence on which he stood.

"We've got him, fast enough," returned Bingham.

A piercing shriek from a window that had been thrown open, denoted the anguish of the Jewess, whose ears had caught these words.

Mr. Dykes and his attendant subordinate now retraced their way to the trap-door, through the aperture of which they once more forced themselves; and when they had regained the landing Dykes said, "Now you go and join my partner Bingham, 'cos this Rainford is a desperate feller, and the more there is to guard him the better."

The man accordingly took his departure, and Mr. Dykes knocked gently at the door of the bedroom.

"Who is there?" asked a voice within,—a voice soft and melodious, but now expressive of the most intense anguish.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said Dykes; "but I must do my duty; and if so be you'll have the kindness to dress yourself, I should like to examine the boxes and cupboards, and such like—just for form's sake, and that's all."

"Must you thus add to the grief which is already—"

The plaintive voice was interrupted by a violent fit of sobbing, with the mournful sounds of which the crying of the little boy now commingled.

"I do n't want to annoy you, ma'am," returned Dykes.

"I should hope not, indeed!" exclaimed the landlady, who, having been alarmed by the disturbance, had got up and dressed herself, and was now ascending the stairs. "But what is it all about? and why do you break into a respectable house in this way? I don't suppose you're thieves—or else—"

"I am an officer, ma'am," exclaimed Dykes, drawing himself up with offended dignity, as the candle which the landlady carried in her hand lighted the landing-place:—"I am an officer, ma'am—and my partners have just taken one Thomas Rainford, a highwayman—"

"A highwayman!" ejaculated the widow, who had never suspected the character of her lodger, and who was a prudent woman that never troubled herself about other people's business so long as her rent was regularly paid.

"Yes—a highwayman," added Dykes. "But I've no time to stand palavering. I b'lieve there's a lady in this room here; and as I must overhaul the place—as the case is a serious one—you'll do well to step in and let me do the job quietly. I do n't want to annoy her: the law is n't at loggerheads with her—and so she's nothing to fear. As for me, I'm as gentle as a lamb when a lady's concerned."

The widow urged the afflicted girl within the room to open the door; and as the latter had by this time dressed herself, the request was complied with.

But the Jewess wore a deep black veil over her head, when the officer and the landlady entered the bed-chamber; and, taking Charley in her arms, she seated herself in a chair near the bed, whispering a few words of consolation to the little boy even amidst the terrible violence of her own grief.

As for Charles, he knew that something wrong was occurring; but he was too young to comprehend the real nature of the appearances which terrified him.

Dykes just opened a cupboard, plunged his hands into a trunk, and turned out the contents of a carpet-bag: but he did not prosecute his search any farther; for he was too much experienced in the ways of robbers and rogues to suppose for a moment that he should find on the premises any portion of the money stolen from Sir Christopher Blunt,—this being the charge on which Rainford was arrested.

The search, such as it was, was merely for form's sake; because the magistrate was sure to inquire whether the prisoner's lodgings had been carefully examined; and this superficial glance at the contents of the boxes would enable Mr. Dykes to give an affirmative answer without any very great deviation from the actual truth.

He accordingly quitted the room within a minute after entering it; but he turned on the landing just to beg "the dear young lady not to take on too much," and also to assure the mistress of the house that she should be recompensed for the injury done to her abode by the violent entry effected by himself and his companions.*

* We should observe that at the time of which we are writing, it was by no means unusual for Bow Street officers to be employed in the pursuit or capture of desperate characters in Surrey, although this county was not strictly within their district.

We must leave the landlady to console—or endeavour to console the unhappy Jewess,—and accompany Mr. Dykes, who passed out of the house by the back way, and stepped over two or three low fences which separated the yards of the respective dwellings, until he reached that one where Tom Rain was in the custody of Bingham and the subordinate runners.

It appeared that the gallant highwayman, finding how hotly he was pursued when he was escaping by means of the trap-door, and dreading lest the whole neighbourhood should be alarmed ere he could possibly get away, had resolved on the dangerous expedient of sliding down from the roof to the back of the buildings, by means of the perpendicular leaden water-pipe. But when he was half-way down in his perilous descent, he missed his hold, and fell upon the stone pavement of the yard beneath. He endeavoured to get up and escape—but could not: his right ankle was sprained, almost to dislocation; and in a few minutes he was discovered and captured by the detachment under the orders of Bingham.

He heard the piercing scream which followed the announcement of his arrest by this officer; and that scream—oh! it went to thy generous heart, Tom Rain!

But he uttered not a word: he offered no resistance, although he had his pistols about him. He not only shrank from the idea of shedding human blood: but he was also well aware that his case was now too desperate to be benefited by even desperate means. For, even if he slew all the officers, he could not drag himself away ere the neighbours would collect and capture him.

And by this time, the whole line of houses was awake with bustle and excitement. Light after light appeared at the different casements—windows were thrown up; and the rumour spread like wildfire, that a famous highwayman had just been arrested.

The reader may well conceive the nature of the sensation which now prevailed all along the back of Brandon Street;—but in one room there was a beautiful woman convulsed with torturing—maddening anguish,—for deep was her love for thee, Tom Rain!

"Now, then," cried Dykes, as he made his appearance in the yard, where the highwayman was sitting on an inverted wash-tub, surrounded by the runners, to whom he had surrendered his pistols:—"now, then lads—let's off with him to quod. How d'ye do, Mr. Rainford! Don't want to crow over a gentleman in trouble—but thought I should have you some day or another." Then, stooping down, he whispered in Tom's ear, "I was obliged to give a look in at the crib up there just now; but I only stayed a moment, and shan't trouble the poor lady any more. She had a veil over her face—and so I don't know who she is: that is, you see, I *shan't* know, if I'm asked any questions by the beak:—but of course I'm aware it's the handsome Jewess that did the diamond business."

"You are mistaken—you are mistaken," said Rainford, emphatically. "But, if you showed her any civility, I sincerely thank you—"

"Lord bless you! Mr. Rainford—I would n't do any thing to annoy you for the world. I can't help admiring a brave man—and you're one. The poor dear lady will be troubled no more by us; and it's

nothing to me who she is, or who she is not. The law do n't want *her*, at all events."

"One word more," said Tom. "Who has done this business for me?"

"A lawyer named Howard," was the answer "But I can't say no more—"

"Then what is the charge against me?" asked Tom, a considerable load already removed from his mind.

"Sir Christopher Blunt's little business—that's all," replied Dykes. "But come along: we must be off to Horsemonger."

Mr. Dykes and Mr. Bingham politely offered Rainford their arms; and the procession passed through the house, in the yard belonging to which the capture had been made. The occupants of that dwelling—men, women, and children, all in their night-dresses—crowded on the stairs to catch a glimpse of the "terrible highwayman," whose good looking appearance excited the sympathy of the female portion of the spectators.

Half an hour afterwards Tom Rain was lodged in a cell in the criminal department of Horsemonger Lane Gaol;—but his heart was lighter than the reader might possibly suppose—for he was relieved of the first and most natural fear that had assailed him: namely, that it was on account of Benjamin Bones's death that he was pursued!

"If I must be hanged," he thought within himself, "I would rather it should be for highway robbery than aught else"—But, O Tamar! Tamar! what is to become of thee?"

And, as he sat on the humble pallet in the darkness of his solitary cell, he buried his face in his manacled hands

In another moment a moonbeam penetrated through the barred window; and in that silver ray glistened the tears which trickled between his fingers.

And yet it was not for himself he wept:—thou wast no coward—but thou hadst a generous heart, Tom Rain.

CHAPTER XLVI.

EXPLANATIONS.

AT eleven o'clock on the following day, Lord Ellingham, who had passed a sleepless and wretched night, called at the house of Lady Hatfield, and was immediately conducted to the drawing-room, where Georgiana was alone in readiness to receive him.

She was dressed in a morning garb, and, though very—very pale, looked surpassingly lovely.

"My dear friend," she said, extending her hand, which, as he offered to press it with rapture to his lips, she gently but still resolutely withdrew,— "my dear friend—for such henceforth must I call you—"

"Georgiana!" he exclaimed, starting back. "what means this coolness?"

"Be seated, Arthur—and listen to me attentively," she said in a plaintive and sweetly touching tone. "I am not very well—my nerves are not strong to-day—and you must not manifest any impatience towards me. Indeed, I ought to have postponed this interview: but I considered it to be my duty—a paramount duty owing alike to yourself and to me—to enter into as early an explanation as possible."

"This preface forebodes nothing favourable to my happiness," murmured the Earl, as he sank into a seat to which Georgiana pointed—but which was not by her side!

"Arthur," she continued, with difficulty maintaining sufficient control over her emotions to enable her to speak calmly and collectedly, "you know not how much I love you—how dearly I am devoted to you. For your sake, and to bear the name of your wife, I could consent to become a mendicant—a wanderer on the face of the earth,—renounce fortune—rank—society—all, in fine, that we women are generally deemed to hold so dear,—yes, all this could I do for your sake, so that you were my companion! Then, conceive how hard it is for me—oh! how very hard, my well-beloved Arthur, to be compelled to say that henceforth we must know each other only as friends!"

"Merciful heavens!" ejaculated the Earl, uncertain whether the imagined capriciousness of his Georgiana was about to assert its tantalizing influence again, or whether any thing of a more serious nature, and connected with the incidents of the preceding evening, was about to present an insuperable bar to his happiness.

"Yes—Arthur," continued Georgiana, in an impressive tone, "henceforth we must be but as brother and sister to each other. And as a dear, fond, affectionate sister will I ever be to you; for your generosity would have made me your wife in spite of—But you cannot wish me to refer to that! And yet it is that one sad episode in my life which now asserts an inexorable influence over the conduct which we must both pursue. It is that event, which you—in the noble candour, in the warm liberality of your admirable disposition—"

"You praise me too highly," Georgiana, exclaimed the Earl. "I loved you—I love you dearly; and in spite of all that you now say, hope is not quenched within me. But, my God! when will this painful suspense pass? When shall I behold you no longer a prey to an influence—"

"Alas! that influence must endure for ever!" murmured Lady Hatfield, tears now trembling upon her eye-lashes.

"No—no!" cried the Earl with impassioned energy. "When, but a few days ago, we entered into explanations with each other—when I informed you that I was aware of the nature of that secret influence which tyrannised over you,—did I not assure you that, as a loving husband, I would so completely study your happiness—"

"Oh! yes," interrupted Georgiana; "and did I not declare that you had given me a proof of affection such as man seldom gave unto woman? Believe me—believe me," she added earnestly, "I felt all that there was great—generous—and noble in your conduct: for, knowing that secret—that sad, that fatal secret—you banished all prejudice—discarded even those scruples which the most high-minded of men so often entertain under such circumstances—"

"Dearest Georgiana!" exclaimed the Earl; "you attach far too much importance to the secret of which you speak. What man that truly loves a virtuous—beautiful—accomplished—and amiable woman, would allow himself to be swayed—"

"Ah! every heart is not so generous as yours!" interrupted Georgiana. "You recognise the complete innocence of my soul—"

"I cannot believe that you would be guilty of the wanton cruelty of inflicting these tortures upon me, Georgiana," said the Earl, "were it not for that strange—that almost morbid state of mind which is at times produced by the recollection of a serious fright which you experienced some years ago, and from the effects of which you have not completely recovered. But, after all, wherefore do you praise me so highly—wherefore do you thank me so much for the simple fact of not allowing the knowledge of this occasional access of morbid feeling to weigh with me—"

"Arthur!" almost shrieked Georgiana, losing all control over herself; "then, you know not the secret—the dreadful secret—"

"Yes: have I not proved to you that I know it?" exclaimed the Earl, surprised and grieved at the strange manner of Lady Hatfield. "Your uncle put me in possession of the facts: and what is there in them, after all? It is a mere adventure which one would now tell only as a Christmas tale—or to amuse children,—had it not produced so serious an influence upon your nerves, and—"

"Arthur! Arthur! is this a cruel pleasantry?" demanded Georgiana hysterically; "or have we misunderstood each other all along?"

"You know that I am incapable of turning to ridicule or making a jest of any thing that regards you, Georgiana," returned the Earl. "And as for any misunderstanding between us, there is none. Our explanation the other day was full—complete—satisfactory—"

"No—no," cried Lady Hatfield, painfully excited. "I see that I am mistaken—that you have learnt a bare fact—"

"Yes: and since we are now conversing on the topic," said the Earl, "let us enter fully into it and then abandon it for ever. I see that you attach much importance to this subject—and that, when we are united, there may be no necessity ever to recur—"

"If ever we are united!" repeated Georgiana, clasping her hands in anguish of heart.

"Yes, my well-beloved," continued the Earl. "And now listen to me. About seven years ago you were staying alone at Mauleverer Lodge in Hampshire—"

"Oh! the fatal time—the fatal place!" cried Georgiana hysterically; and though she would have given worlds to cut short the conversation, she had not the power—for her mind was agitated like the ocean in a storm.

"You were staying alone at Mauleverer Lodge, proceeded Arthur, not observing the extent of her emotion; "you were alone, save in respect to the servants: but you had no relation—no friend there at the moment. And one night—a man broke in—"

"A man—with a black mask—" murmured Georgiana, almost wringing her hands.

"And bearing the denomination, too, of the *Black Mask*," continued Lord Ellingham;—"this man broke into the house—and—"

"And—merciful heavens! Spare me the recital of the rest!" shrieked Lady Hatfield, covering her face with her hands.

"Good God! do not thus give way to a reminiscence which, though painful, should no longer exercise any influence over a strong mind!" said the Earl, in a kind and soothing tone, as he approached

and seated himself next to Georgiana. "Consider, my dearly beloved—my angel—my intended wife!—reflect, I implore you, upon the childishness of this behaviour!"

"Childishness!" repeated Georgiana, with a convulsive shudder.

"Pardon the expression," said the Earl; "but I would reason with you—I would endeavour to persuade you that an occurrence which is past and gone, and which happens frequently in other houses, should not thus paralyse all the naturally fine energies of your soul. What, in the name of heaven! can it matter now, if a robber broke into a dwelling one six or seven years ago? Your uncle told me that for some months fears were entertained for your reason: but—Oh! my Georgiana, I do implore you now—now that we are once again touching on this painful—most painful theme—to exercise more command over yourself. You praise me—you thank me, because I am willing to espouse one whose reason was shocked long years ago;—for that is your secret, after all, Georgiana—dearest Georgiana;—and you perceive that I know it!"

"My God! how have we misunderstood each other!" murmured the unhappy lady;—"my secret—he knows it *not*!"

But the Earl could not catch the sense of the words which she thus whispered to herself; and, with the fond hope of consoling her—for the events of the preceding evening were for the time banished from his memory—he took her hand, pressed it to his lips, and began to utter syllables of tenderness and love.

Then, how terrible was his surprise—how acute the anguish which filled his soul, when Georgiana, suddenly starting from the half-embrace in which he was already enfolding her, exclaimed in a tone indicative of the most exquisite mental agony, "No—Arthur—no: you are not acquainted with my secret—*and now*, never, never will you learn it! We have misunderstood each other—and I consented the other day to become your wife, while labouring under a dreadful—oh! a dreadful error! But heaven has interposed to prevent the consummation of *your* misery—and *mine*!" And now," she added, with the calmness of despair, "let us separate, Arthur—and henceforth be unto each other but brother and sister;—for your wife I cannot become!"

"Georgiana, this is cruelty the most refined—the most wanton!" exclaimed the Earl. "Am I again to pass through all the phases of suspense—uncertainty—mystery—and doubt?—and will you in a few days repent of all you have said, and recall this stern decision? But—much as I love you—deeply as I am attached to you—I cannot—cannot endure a treatment——"

"Pardon me—forgive me!" cried Georgiana; "but you do not comprehend me! My reason is not unlunged,—I am subject to no whims—no caprice, Arthur! A fatal mistake on my part alone induced me the other day to consent to become your wife. That error has now been cleared up—our conversation of this morning has convinced me of the tremendous misunderstanding that had nearly wrecked all *your* happiness! But, even had it not, there was *another* reason which would imperatively command us to think no more of each other in the same light as we so lately did!"

"Ah! you allude, perchance, to the incident of

last evening!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham. "Permit me, then, to ask the object of that Rainford's visit? Did he insult you? did he attempt to extort money from you? If so——"

"No—no!" cried Georgiana, in whose bosom the mere mention of the highwayman's name appeared to excite the most agonising feelings. "I sent down a message to that effect last night. He did not insult me—he did not come to injure me——"

"But his presence excited you most painfully, Georgiana!" interrupted the Earl; "and it has also revived in your imagination—Oh! I understand it all!" he cried, suddenly interrupting himself: "this Rainford is the Black Mask—the noted highwayman of Hampshire!"

Lady Hatfield cast upon the young nobleman a look expressive of so much mental suffering, that he was deeply touched—profoundly affected: and yet he knew not how to administer consolation.

"Georgiana," he at length said, in as calm and collected a tone as he could assume, though his heart was in reality rent by the most painful emotions, "there is some terrible mystery in all this! I begin to believe—as you yourself ere now endeavoured to persuade me—that your reason is in no way affected—that you are not subject to mere whims and caprices. No—the cause of your grief—your anguish—your horror at the reminiscence of that event in Hampshire,—an anguish and a horror cruelly revived last night by the presence of that Rainford, who is doubtless identical with the Black Mask,—an anguish and a horror perpetuated, too, until now," continued Arthur, more emphatically,—"*the cause of all this is far—far more serious than I had at first imagined. You say that you cannot become my wife—and that you have laboured under a misapprehension: you wish us to look upon each other as brother and sister. And yet you do love me well enough to become my wife—did not some terrible and fearfully mysterious obstacle stand in the way. Oh! if you really love me—then pity me, and tell me this dreadful secret which weighs upon your mind! Unless, indeed——*"

And he paused abruptly, as an awful suspicion rushed into his brain.

Georgiana only turned her head aside, and sobbed convulsively.

"Unless, indeed," continued the Earl, after a few moments' silence, "it would bring a blush to your cheek to enlighten me; and I cannot—cannot ask you to humiliate yourself in my presence!"

"Arthur, I *dare* not become your wife!" exclaimed Georgiana, suddenly falling upon her knees before him; "and if you demand the reason—as, after all that has passed between us, you have a right—I will confess——"

"Georgiana, no more!" cried the Earl, hastening to raise her. "Not for worlds would I bring a blush to your cheek." Then, in a different—more serious—and very mournful tone, he added, "Henceforth we will be to each other as sister and brother."

With these words he touched her hand lightly with his lips, and was about to hurry from the room; when, animated by a sudden thought, Georgiana held him back, saying in a hollow, thick tone of voice, "Whatever suspicion you now entertain—you do not believe that I—*was guilty*?" she added, as if the very words were choking her.

"No, much injured woman!" cried the young nobleman warmly. "A light has broken in upon my mind—and I understand it all."

"Yes—for a pure soul dwells in a tainted body," murmured Lady Hatfield; "and if I have said this much—and you can well believe how painful to my feelings the mere necessity of making such an assertion must be,—but in making it, I am influenced only by the hope—the earnest hope of removing from your mind—the mind of one whom I so much respect—so highly esteem—"

"Say no more, my dearest sister!" interrupted the Earl emphatically; "for as a sister do I now look upon you—and as a *brother*," he added sternly, "will I avenge you. For *that* was I ere now hurrying away so abruptly!"

"Avenge me!" repeated Georgiana, looking wildly on the young nobleman's countenance, which wore a calm but determined expression.

"Yes, Georgiana," replied the Earl: "wrongs so deep as yours demand a deadly vengeance. And who so fit to become the instrument of that vengeance, than he whom those wrongs which you have sustained so cruelly redound upon? But for that incarnate fiend Rainford, would you not already—yes, already have been my loved and loving wife? Am I not, then, also wronged by him? have I not something to avenge?" he demanded bitterly. "And to consummate this vengeance, Georgiana, I—your *brother*—henceforth—will forget my proud title—cast aside the remembrance of my elevated rank;—and, dressed in mean attire, I will visit the noisome dens—the foul courts—the low neighbourhoods of London, until I discover that miscreant Rainford. Then will I—still forgetting the proud title and the elevated rank—dare him to meet me in a duel, from which at least but one shall depart alive, and wherein both may haply fall! I will not yield him up to the hangman, Georgiana," continued the Earl, fearfully excited; "because in his last moments he might confess his crimes, and include amongst them the foul wrong he has inflicted on thee, my sister! But I will descend to make myself his equal—I will place myself on a level with that black-hearted ruffian—"

"Hold! hold!" screamed Georgiana, suddenly recovering the powers of utterance which had been paralyzed by this tremendous explosion of generous indignation on the part of that proudly-born noble who proclaimed himself her champion. "Hold! hold! Arthur—you know not whom you calumniate—whom you would provoke to the duel of death!"

"Yes—too well I know the miscreant!" cried the Earl furiously.

"No—no—you know him not!" screamed Georgiana wildly.

"This is childish—silly!" said the Earl impatiently. "Was it not Rainford who—"

"Yes—yes: but this Rainford—"

"Is a fiend, with a heart so black—"

"Hold! hold! again I say," ejaculated Lady Hatfield, clasping her hands in despair. "That Thomas Rainford whom you would make the victim of your vengeance, is—"

"Is what?" demanded the Earl hastily.

"Is—is—"

"Who? in the name of heaven!"

"YOUR BROTHER!" was the hysterical reply.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FARTHER EXPLANATIONS.

"MY brother!" repeated the Earl of Ellingham, with a wild glance and a sudden start, indicative of the most painful surprise. "My brother! Georgiana!—oh! no—impossible! 'Tis true that my father—but no—that child died—"

"I can give you no particulars—offer you no evidence in this most strange and mysterious matter," said Lady Hatfield, endeavouring to subdue the excitement produced in her much-agitated mind by the preceding scene. "All that I know is—all that *he* told me was that secret which I have now revealed to you! Thus, Arthur, you perceive that—*independent of the other reason* which would prevent me from becoming yours, and *you* from receiving me as your wife—"

"But wherefore did you not mention this at first—at the commencement of our conversation this morning?" demanded the nobleman, utterly bewildered by the revelation that had been made to him, and scarcely knowing whether to regard it as a substantial fact or a miserable fiction.

"Because Rainford himself appeared to tell it to me as a profound secret," observed Georgiana. "Not that he desired me to consider it as such: but his manner—and then the nature of the revelation itself, which could not be gratifying to your feelings—oh! I scarcely know what I am saying, Arthur—but I would have spared your feelings, had you not compelled me to make that revelation, to prevent the mad—the insane designs of vengeance which you had formed—"

"I understand you, Georgiana," interrupted the Earl: "and deeply—oh! deeply do I feel your generous consideration on that point. But there is one question that I wish to ask you—a question—"

"Speak, Arthur! This is the day of mutual outpourings of confidence," said Lady Hatfield: "and, remember—we are henceforth to stand in the light of brother and sister to each other!"

"The question I would ask is relative to the robbery that was perpetrated on you and Miss Mor-daunt a short time back near Hounslow," continued the Earl. "Was that highwayman—"

"He was—he was!" exclaimed Georgiana, once more painfully excited. "But do not look coldly on me, Arthur—do not despise me for that dreadful crime of perjury which I committed to save him. He wrote me an imperious note, commanding me to stop all proceedings instituted in reference to that matter. What did such a note imply? It was a menace—a dreadful menace—a threat to expose me, if I did not obey his mandate! Consider, Arthur—oh! consider how I was placed—my reputation at stake—my fame in the hands of one who—But can you wonder that I preferred the dread alternative of perjury to the danger of disgrace and infamy which seemed to impend over my head?"

"Alas! I cannot blame you, poor, suffering woman?" ejaculated the Earl in a tone of deep commiseration. "We never know how we should act until we find ourselves placed in circumstances of difficulty and embarrassment; and then—then even the most rigid integrity often yields! But let us sit down quietly, Georgiana, for a short half-hour—compose ourselves, if we can—collect our



scattered thoughts—and converse together as sister and brother. For I will now communicate to you the little I know concerning the birth of Thomas Rainford—if he indeed be the offspring of that amour—”

Arthur ceased, and passed his hand over his brow as if to calm the warfare of thoughts and conjectures which agitated his brain.

Georgiana seated herself on the sofa, and the Earl at length took a chair near her.

He then continued in the following manner:—

“My father, the late Earl, was married twice: his first matrimonial connexion was formed when he was thirty; and this union was unproductive of issue. Lady Ellingham, as I have heard, was a woman devotedly attached to the dissipation of a fashionable life. She seemed to exist only to shine in the gay assemblies of the West End; and, as she had no children, and her husband was immersed in politics, she possessed no ties to bind her to her own fireside. She played deeply—for play was very fashionable then amongst ladies, and is even now to a considerable extent. Her extravagances were great, and she made rapid inroad upon my father’s fortune. By the time

he was forty he found himself involved in debts; and moreover, rumour began to be so busy with the name of his wife, imputing to her the most shameless infidelity, that he determined to separate from her. I should not allude to this circumstance—I would not for a moment revive statements prejudicial to the memory of a woman who has long ago gone to render an account of her deeds to her Maker—were it not that respect for the name of my lamented father renders me anxious to discover any extenuation which offers itself for his subsequent conduct. Well, a separation was resolved upon: a certain income was settled upon Lady Ellingham; the estate was put ‘to nurse,’ as the law-phrase has it; and my father, who was a proud man, retired to a small property which he possessed in Ireland, ostensibly for the purpose of giving up the cares of public life, but in reality to conceal the necessity of retrenching his expenditure. Ten years passed away: and when my father was upwards of fifty, he returned to London, his estates having in the meantime been relieved of all their incumbrances. Lady Ellingham was still living: but the smallness

of her income and the impaired condition of her health, forced her to dwell in the strictest retirement. She had moreover become a devotee, and manifested no desire to return into the dazzling scenes of fashionable life.

"I am now speaking of about thirty-one years ago; when I was not born. It was at that period that my father encountered a young and very beautiful girl, named Octavia Manners. She was the half-sister of a marine-store dealer, who bore the disagreeable appellation of Benjamin Bones. By all I have heard, Octavia must have been a charming creature; and her manners, acquirements, and conversation were far superior to her humble condition in life. I cannot give you any details respecting the way in which my father became acquainted with her: suffice it to say that he grew deeply attached to her, and his visits were encouraged by her brother. But, alas! from all that I have heard, I have grounds—oh! too strong grounds to believe that those visits were most unwelcome to Octavia; for she was beloved by a young man in her own sphere of life, and whom she loved in return. And it is now that I would palliate—as far as possible—the conduct of my sire, while I am bound to admit that his proceedings in respect to that unhappy girl were most unworthy the noble and the man. My heart aches, too, as I utter these words: but I am telling you a history, the truth of which must not be disguised nor in any way misrepresented. But some allowance—some little excuse may be found for a man who was separated from a wife whom he had not seen for many years, and to whom there were positively no moral ties, although the legal ones still existed, to bind his fidelity. He was devotedly attached to a young and beautiful girl who unfortunately could not return his love, and who did not even seem flattered by his visits, as so many maidens in her sphere would have been. No—she shrank from his addresses, and implored him not to persecute her!

"But he persisted in his visits; and the first sad result was that the young man to whom Octavia's faith was pledged, would not believe that she discouraged the attentions of the nobleman who condescended to appear at that humble dwelling. I cannot of course inform you, although we may both imagine, how the young man reproached Octavia, and how she defended herself: but it is certain that he suddenly quitted the neighbourhood, leaving behind him a note declaring that he should never see the unhappy girl again. Alas! that I should now be compelled to recite the tale of my father's guilt—my father's crime! His love for Octavia knew no bounds—he was determined to risk all—every thing—"

"Spare your feelings, Arthur—dear Arthur!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield; "for I can fully appreciate the grief which this revival of such a subject must cause you!"

"Octavia, then, was purchased—purchased with gold—my father's gold, Georgiana;—and the deed of—dare I call it aught save *infamy*?—was consummated!" said the Earl, in a low and subdued tone, as if he were overcome by the enormity of his sire's guilt—that guilt which, with a venial filial affection, he had vainly endeavoured to palliate. "Yes—'twas done," he continued sadly; "and the vile half-brother sold the honour of that young and

already too deeply afflicted girl. Too deeply afflicted, I say, because she had lost him on whom the affections of her youthful heart were set. The very day after her disgrace—her ruin, she fled from her brother's house; and for several months no trace was discovered of her. It was feared she had committed suicide; and my father was almost distracted. At that precise period his wife died, having ended as a devotee that life of which so much of the early portion was passed in dissipation and illicit amours. She had not been laid many weeks in the family vault, when my father, by some means unknown to me—perhaps, by accident—discovered that Octavia was living, and that she was in the way to become a mother. He hastened to the miserable garret which she occupied, and found her in the most abject state of poverty—endeavouring to earn a subsistence with her needle. A girl of the gipsy tribe, and whose name was Miranda, was the friend and companion of poor Octavia. How they grew acquainted—how they came to live together, I am not aware: but Miranda was much attached to poor Octavia, and was nearly her own age. Indeed Octavia was not seventeen even at that time; and this Miranda of whom I speak, was about fifteen. Much mystery envelopes this portion of the sad tale: it is, however, certain that my father visited Octavia for several days—that he passed hours with her—that she even appeared to be reconciled to his presence—and that they went out together, and remained absent for hours, on two or three occasions. Again she disappeared—suddenly—abruptly—without having intimated her intention to my father, and without even having confided her design to her friend Miranda. For Miranda remained behind at the lodging, and when my father called and found Octavia not, he was seized with a paroxysm of the deepest grief.

"Another year passed away; and behold, poverty and distress drove the unfortunate Octavia to seek an asylum at the house of her half-brother. She would not, doubtless, have gone near that fatal dwelling where her ruin was accomplished, had it not been for the child which she held in her arms. That child—a boy—was the fruit of her connexion with my father,—or rather of the dreadful deed which gave her, when under the influence of an opiate, into his arms. But she was dying—yes, she was dying, when she knocked at her brother's door; and on her death-bed she implored that my father might be sent for. He flew to her: he knelt by her side—he took the child in his arms, and embraced both the dying mother and the innocent babe. By a strange—a wondrous coincidence, Miranda entered the house at that moment: she had come to make inquiries concerning Octavia—and found her dying. The poor mother forgave those who had wronged her,—forgave her half-brother—blessed my father—yes, blessed him—and recommended her infant to his care—that infant being also his own! Then my father requested to be left alone with her; but scarcely had the villain Bones and the faithful Miranda quitted the room, when they were recalled by a dreadful cry which burst from my father's lips;—and they hurried back to find that Octavia was no more."

Arthur paused to wipe away the tears which were trickling down his cheeks; nor were Georgiana's eyes unmoistened by the sweet dews of sympathy.

"When my father had sufficiently recovered himself to attend to more worldly matters," continued the young Earl, "he gave directions for the funeral of his victim; and to Miranda did he entrust the child. Then he placed in the hands of Benjamin Bones, in the presence of Miranda, a thousand guineas to be placed out at interest, in order to provide the means of supporting the infant and his nurse. I should also inform you that a small roll of papers, carefully wrapped up in a piece of thick brown paper, was found upon the person of Octavia, shortly after her death; and these were taken possession of by Benjamin Bones, my father having previously quitted the house. Of the nature of those documents I know nothing; but I have been informed that when the half-brother read them, he was greatly excited, and secured them under lock and key.

"A year elapsed, during which my father called several times to see the little boy, who thrived well in Miranda's care. But at the expiration of that period his visits ceased altogether;—for he was about to marry again. Twenty-nine years ago the Honourable Miss Stamford became his second wife; and twenty-six years ago I was born. But before the date of my birth—and within six months after the marriage of my father appeared in the newspapers—Bones discharged Miranda on some pretence; and she returned to her tribe. Some few months afterwards she fell in with another tribe; and to her profound surprise, she discovered the child Thomas in the possession of a woman named Egyptia. Of the child's identity Miranda had no doubt, because it had a peculiar mark near the shoulder of the right arm. She and her sister-gipsy then compared notes, and Egyptia told her that she had received the child from a man named Benjamin Bones—a marine-store dealer in Greville Street, Hatton Garden; that Bones had given her twenty guineas to take the child; that the money was all gone; and that she already repented of the bargain. Miranda, who was attached to the child, offered to take it; and her proposal was accepted. For seven years did the faithful Miranda rear that boy as if he were her own; but at last she fell dangerously ill—was long delirious—and when she awoke to consciousness again, she learnt from her companions that the boy had died of the same epidemic malady beneath which she herself had nearly succumbed."

Again the Earl paused for a few moments; and when he again broke silence, it was to conclude his narrative.

"My father, as you are aware, Georgiana, died when I was only a year old; and I was brought up by my mother. At the age of nineteen I went to Oxford; and it was in the neighbourhood of that city I one day fell in with a party of gipsies. They offered to tell my fortune; and I consented for the amusement of the farce. The young female who undertook the task commenced by giving me my real name; for I had doubtless been pointed out to her in the city, as the gipsies had been there and in the vicinity for several days.* But the moment my name was mentioned, another gipsy-woman, who had probably seen forty summers, uttered an ejaculation of surprise—looked hard at me—and then

inquired abruptly whether I was the son of the late Earl of Ellingham. I answered in the affirmative; and she let drop some observations which excited my curiosity. I took her aside, thrust a guinea into her hand, and demanded of her the meaning of her words. She returned me the money, and, after much persuasion, narrated to me the whole history of Octavia Manners—that is to say, as much of it as I have now told to you. You now understand, Georgiana, how it is possible that this Thomas Rainford may be my half-brother: but, if he be, the account of his death, received by Miranda from her companions, must have been false;—for I need hardly tell you that the elderly gipsy who unfolded to me the details of my father's fatal conduct towards poor Octavia, was none other than Miranda herself. Shortly afterwards my mother died; but I never revealed to her the story of her late husband's guilt and Octavia's wrongs."

Scarcely was this strange narrative concluded, when the door of the apartment opened, and Sir Ralph Walsingham entered the room.

"Well," he exclaimed, "Mr. Rainford, who honoured this house with a visit last night, and frightened you, Georgiana, so sadly, has got himself into a pleasant scrape at last—"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham hastily: "what—"

"He is arrested on a charge of highway robbery—a robbery, in fact, committed on no less a person than our acquaintance Sir Christopher Blunt," returned the baronet.

"Arrested!" ejaculated the Earl, exchanging a rapid glance with Georgiana, as much as to enjoin her not to allow the subject of their previous conversation to transpire in the presence of Sir Ralph Walsingham.

"Yes—arrested last night—lodged in Horsemonger Lane Gaol, as a character too desperate to put into the usual lock-up—and examined before the Magistrates at the office in the Borough this morning," continued Sir Ralph. "I happened to be in the neighbourhood an hour ago, and heard all about it. But he is remanded for a week, at the solicitation of Mr. Howard, the attorney for the prosecution, Sir Christopher not being in London. Well, poor fellow! I am really sorry for him—for he seems to be a dashing, daring, gallant blade, by all accounts. Pardon me, however, my dear Georgiana," he added, seeing that his niece was deadly pale; "I ought not to have spoken a word in favour of a man who terrified you so: but—"

Lord Ellingham interrupted Sir Ralph by taking his leave of him and Georgiana; and as the nobleman took the latter by the hand, he said in a hasty whisper, "I will go and see him at once!"

He then left the house, entered a hackney-coach at the nearest stand, and ordered the driver to take him to Horsemonger Lane Gaol.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LORD ELLINGHAM AND TOM RAIN.

THE interview between Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham had lasted a considerable time and it was close upon three o'clock in the afternoon when his lordship reached Horsemonger Lane Gaol.

* For the mode adopted by Gipsies to glean information relative to persons in the various neighbourhoods they visit, see "The History of Skilligalee" in the First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON."

He communicated to the governor his desire to see Thomas Rainford; and although visitors were usually compelled to speak to prisoners through an iron grating, yet the rank of the nobleman and the fact of his being in the commission of the peace for another county (Middlesex), procured him immediate access to the highwayman's cell.

Rainford was sitting in a pensive attitude at a table on which his dinner remained untouched. We have before said—and we now repeat—that he cared but little for the peril of his own predicament: there were, however, ties which bound him to the existence that was now in jeopardy, and to the freedom that was lost.

He started from his seat with unfeigned surprise, when the Earl of Ellingham entered the cell.

"You are astonished to see me here, Mr. Rainford?" said the nobleman, in a mild and mournful tone.

"It is a visit, my lord," was the answer, "that I certainly did not expect."

"And yet—if the statement you made to Lady Hatfield be true—I am but performing a duty—"

"Ah! then she has told you *that*," exclaimed the prisoner.

"She has told me that you claim a near—a very near relationship to me," rejoined the nobleman, his voice trembling with emotion—for the reader has seen enough of him to be aware that he possessed a generous heart.

"Yes—my lord," replied Rainford: "the same father was the author of our being—although our mothers were different."

"Is this true?—is it really true?" demanded the Earl hastily.

"As true as there is an Almighty God who now beholds the great peer and the prisoned highwayman face to face!" replied Rainford solemnly; and divesting himself of his coat, he bared his right arm and exhibited a particular mark.

"I cannot doubt it—I cannot disbelieve you!" exclaimed the nobleman, tears starting from his eyes.

And then the great peer and the prisoned highwayman were folded in each other's arms.

"But, my God!" exclaimed Arthur, when the excitement of this fraternal recognition had somewhat passed away; "in what a condition do I find you, my poor brother!"

"Grieve not for me, Arthur," said Rainford: "my fate will soon be decided now; and whatever it may be, I shall be prepared to meet it as becomes a brave man."

"Talk not thus, Thomas!" cried the nobleman, pressing his hand warmly. "I have money to buy off your prosecutors—interest to use in your behalf—"

"If I say to you, 'Yes, use both,' Arthur," replied the highwayman, "it is only because there is *one* who loves me well, and for whose sake I could wish to live."

"I understand you—you allude to Miss Esther de Medina," said the Earl. "But there is *another* for whose sake you must hope to live and enjoy freedom again: and that is the brother who now stands before you, and who, for our father's sake, will never—never desert you!"

"My dear Arthur, your kindness unmans me," said Rainford; "and yet—if you knew all—you would perhaps think that I am not altogether un-

worthy of your sympathy! But, sit down, and let me show you that, though of lost and ruined reputation, I am not without some feeling!"

The Earl took one of the two chairs that there were in the cell; and Rainford seated himself near his half-brother on the other.

"That you are acquainted with a considerable portion of my history, I know," resumed the highwayman; "for some seven or eight years ago you encountered a gipsy-woman near Oxford, who revealed to you—"

"The faithful Miranda indeed told me all she knew!" interrupted the Earl. "But at that period she believed you to have been long dead."

"Yes—and it was only a short time ago that I met her in Hampshire," answered Rainford; "and accident led us to converse together. A word or two which I dropped without anticipating the result, induced her to make certain inquiries: then she requested me, in a hurried and excited manner, to bare my right arm—and it was only on the occasion of which I am speaking, and which occurred a few months since, that I learnt the real narrative of my birth. It appears that when Miranda had fallen so dangerously ill, and had become delirious, the gipsies considered me to be a burthen to them, as I was not born of their race; and one of them took me to Winchester, in the neighbourhood of which city the tents were pitched at the time; and there he purposely abandoned me. What subsequently became of me I have not time now to relate; my history has been most eventful, and could not be compressed into a short narrative. But should the laws of my country demand that my misdeeds be expiated on the scaffold, I will leave that history, written out in all its remarkable details, for your contemplation."

"Talk not thus, Thomas—oh! talk not thus!" cried Arthur. "I will save you yet—even if I throw myself at the feet of my sovereign, and proclaim that you are my brother!"

"God grant that you may prove successful, for the sake of *one* who loves me well!" said Rainford, solemnly. "But let me pursue the thread of that much of my story which I have now to relate to you. It appears that when Miranda *did* recover from her serious illness, the gipsies did not like to tell her the truth relative to myself; and they therefore invented the tale of my death to account for my disappearance. Thus was it that, until a few months ago, she remained in ignorance of the deceit that had been practised upon her; and the same day which revealed to her the fact that I was still alive, made me acquainted with the history of my birth. Miranda also told me that Benjamin Bones was still in existence and was reputed to be a rich man. She had recently been in London; and curiosity had prompted her to make inquiries concerning him. All that she had gleaned, she communicated to me. It then struck me that I would come to London—that I would throw myself in the way of that man who had plundered me of my inheritance—and that I would watch for some favourable opportunity to wring from him the amount with interest and compound interest, that was fairly mine. I learnt from Miranda that certain papers had been found about the person of my poor mother, after she was dead, and that the perusal of them had excited the interest of this Bones. It therefore struck me that I might recover those

documents, as well as the money of which I had been plundered. If the documents should prove in any way interesting or valuable, I thought, so much the better: if not, no harm would be done in obtaining possession of them. I came to London; and accident enabled me, through the intervention of a mutual acquaintance named Tullock, to meet with Benjamin Bones. I offered him my services in a particular way—and he accepted them. To be candid, he was to plan deeds of villany—and I was to execute them. His terms were so ridiculously exorbitant that I should have laughed at them, had I not a particular object to serve in connecting myself with him. And the opportunity which I sought presented itself sooner than I had anticipated. In a word, I had succeeded in all I had undertaken: I was enabled to help myself to as much as I chose of his hoarded treasures—and I discovered the papers that I have alluded to."

"And were they of any interest?" asked the Earl.

"Of such interest and of such value, Arthur," returned Tom Rain, "that perhaps there is no other man in England who would have failed to avail himself of the brilliant prospects that they opened to my view. But I was not to be dazzled by them—not to be led away by the temptation. No: I knew that my character was gone—that my reputation was tarnished—that my misdeeds were numerous and great;—and I felt also for *you*, Arthur—as well as for the haughty name of Ellingham!"

"What do you mean, my dear brother?" cried the noble, struck by the impressive tone in which Rainford uttered these words.

"I mean," answered the debased highwayman to the great peer, "that within the last few days there has been within my reach a jewel which I might have had, and might still have, for the mere trouble of extending my hand to reach it: a jewel such as men toil all their lives to gain! This jewel is a proud title and a princely fortune——"

"Thomas!—my brother!" ejaculated the Earl, a strange and exciting suspicion flashing through his brain.

"Yes—a proud title and a princely fortune, Arthur," repeated Rainford: "but I desire neither! Yet—solemnly and seriously do I declare that, amongst those papers which I discovered in the den of Benjamin Bones, there was one which would make me rich at the expense of another—ennoble me to the prejudice of one whom the proud title better becomes,—and that individual who would thus suffer is *yourself*! For Octavia Manners was the Countess of Ellingham—and I—the debased highwayman, am thine elder brother, legitimately born!"

"Oh! what do I hear?" exclaimed Arthur: "and how much generosity does your conduct display! But think not, dearest brother, that I grieve at the announcement which you have just made! No—far from that! To know that my father did justice to your poor mother—to be able to entertain the conviction that the author of our being was less guilty than I imagined—is a source of satisfaction so pure—so sincere—so heart-felt, that I would gladly purchase it even with the loss of title and of fortune!"

"It is you who are generous, Arthur," said Rainford—for so we shall continue to call him, at all events for the present. "But that coronet which sits so gracefully on your noble brow, and that for-

tune which enables you to do so much good, shall never be lost to you. No—never, Arthur! Titles I care not for—great wealth I do not crave;—and even if I yearned for the one or aspired to the other, of what avail would be that idle—ineffectual ambition? Here am I in a vile dungeon—accused of a serious offence—my life endangered! And, even if your interest should save me, must I not for ever become an exile from the land of my birth? Yes: for whether you deter the prosecutors from farther proceedings in my case,—or, should they push the matter to the extreme verge, and my life be saved only at your intercession,—can I remain in England? If released from custody, how can I hope to gain an honest name in this clime?—if condemned to death, and then reprieved, will not this leniency on the part of the Crown be conceded on the condition of banishment for the remainder of my days? Thus, Arthur, even did I desire to possess the proud name of Ellingham—did I aspire to that coronet which adorns thy brow—I could not be mad enough to yield to the temptation. But, I repeat—I care not for rank—I need not much wealth; and thus neither my position nor my inclination will for an instant permit me to disturb you in the enjoyment of the family honours and the hereditary estates."

"Alas! how much—how deeply do I regret that we had not met before to embrace as brothers!" exclaimed the Earl. "Though crimes are imputed to you, Thomas,—yet do you possess a heart endowed with the loftiest—the most generous feelings! Ah! well do I now understand wherefore you were agitated last night at Lady Hatfield's house—and why you told me that from no other man in England would you ask as a favour that right of egress from the mansion which you could command by force! And I, who was once on the point of striking you! But wherefore did you not then reveal to me what you have told me now?"

"The secret of my birth you should never have learnt from *my* lips," answered Rainford. "No—I would not have allowed you to know that you possessed a relative for whom you would have to blush. But I was compelled to make that revelation to Lady Hatfield—because——"

"Ah! let us not talk of her, brother!" said Lord Ellingham mournfully. "I would not for worlds reproach you—and yet you know not how profoundly I have loved that woman—how tenderly I love her still! But my hopes there—Let us change the topic, I say!" he added, hastily interrupting himself. "And now tell me if there be any thing I can do in order to soften the grief which must be experienced by that *one* to whom you alluded ere now—any message that I can take to her——"

"Yes: you must see *her*," said Rainford, after a moment's reflection; "and you must tell her that she is to give up to you all those papers which relate to the marriage of our father and my mother and to my birth. She is acquainted with every thing that concerns me and my affairs. It was my original intention to keep those papers—not to serve any purpose—never to use them,—but to gratify one of those unaccountable whims which sometimes influence the most strong-minded amongst us. I thought that, perhaps, when in a foreign land,—for it was my intention to have quitted this country in a few days,—I might sometimes feel a pleasure in contemplating documents so closely connected with

my parentage and my birth. Perhaps, too, I might have been swayed by some little sentiment of pride in being able to say to myself, '*A title and a princely fortune are within my grasp; and I will not take them, because I feel myself so utterly unworthy of the first, and because I require not the other.*'—But now, let my fate be whatever it may, it is prudent that those papers should be destroyed. She, who has them in her keeping, loves me—adores me: but she has one foible—one weakness which has already produced serious embarrassment. She is fond of gay apparel—of costly jewels—of those trinkets and that outward show which dazzle the minds of so many women; and this passion on her part is stronger than herself. In a word, then, I would rather that the papers should not remain in her hands—I would sooner that they should be burnt at once than become the source of a temptation which circumstances might perhaps some day render irresistible to *her*. If you really wish to ease my mind of any portion of that weight of anxiety which now hangs upon it, you will at once visit her; and when you tell her all that has passed between you and me ere now, she will give you up those documents, which I enjoin you to commit to the flames, when you have perused them."

"I will do your bidding, Thomas, in all respects save one," returned Lord Ellingham: "and that is with regard to the destruction of the papers. No—if you are generous to a degree, I must at least be just; and I will keep those documents for you—safely, religiously keep them—to be at your disposal at any time, however remote, should altered circumstances induce you to claim them."

"Then you imagine," said Rainford, with something of bitterness in his tone, "that should the future smile upon me, I might be tempted to pluck the coronet from your brow to place it on mine own? You wrong me—yes, you wrong me, Arthur!"

"Heaven knows that I would not willingly—wantonly do so!" cried the nobleman enthusiastically. "But, justice—"

"Well—be it as you say," interrupted Rainford, with a view to terminate the discussion on this topic. "Obtain the papers—they will be safer with you than with her, much as she is devoted to me. And now must I reveal to you another secret—a secret of a strange and romantic nature, connected with *her* whom you are about to visit—"

"With Esther?" said the Earl hastily.

"Ah! ever harping upon that name!" exclaimed Rainford. "Did I not assure you last night that Esther is as pure and innocent as woman can be, and that she does not even know me by sight? See, then, if I have deceived you:—but I will not keep you in suspense—"

At this moment, the turnkey entered with an intimation that it was impossible to allow the interview to be protracted any longer on the present occasion, as the hour for locking up had already passed some time.

"To-morrow, then, you will come again," said Rainford, in a low whisper to his brother. "And now go to No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields—it is not very far from here—and inquire for Mrs. Rainford."

The Earl pressed his hand in assurance of obeying the directions thus given; and, as the turnkey appeared impatient, the young nobleman hurried away from his brother's cell.

But the mystery relative to Esther de Medina—whatever it might be—was not so soon to be cleared up as the Earl of Ellingham expected.

Upon leaving the prison, he observed an ill-looking fellow lounging about at the gate, and on whose forbidding countenance the light of the lamp streamed fully when the wicket was opened to afford the nobleman egress:—for our readers will remember that all the incidents yet related in this narrative occurred in the winter time, when it is dark at four o'clock.

But it was now nearly six o'clock; and the atmosphere was heavy with mist.

The Earl walked rapidly away from the prison-gate; but when he had proceeded about thirty yards, he inquired of a passer-by the way to Lock's Fields.

The man was a stranger in the neighbourhood, and could not tell him.

"Please, sir, I'll show you the way," exclaimed another individual, stepping officiously forward.

Lord Ellingham immediately recognised, by the light that glimmered from a window in Horsemonger Lane, the ill-looking fellow whom he had noticed at the door of the prison; and for an instant he hesitated to accept his services. But at the next moment he felt ashamed of this vague alarm, and directed the man to lead on.

The fellow turned abruptly round, saying, "You are going out of your way, sir. We must get down to the Fields by the back of the prison."

And he led the way, the Earl following him, down Horsemonger Lane towards Harper Street. But as they passed along the prison-wall, Arthur observed two or three men loitering about at short intervals from each other; and it struck him that his guide coughed in a peculiar fashion as he passed them.

A misgiving, which he vainly endeavoured to resist, was now excited in the Earl's mind; but still he would not turn back nor question his guide.

Suddenly he was seized from behind, and pulled violently backward, while a strong hand fastened itself as it were over his mouth. He struggled desperately: but his guide turned on him, and he was now in the grasp of four powerful men, whose united strength it was impossible to resist.

Still he endeavoured to release himself: and once he managed to get the hand away from his mouth, an advantage of which he instantly availed himself to cry out for help.

But in another instant he was stunned by the blow of a pistol on the head.

When he awoke, he was in total darkness, and lying on a hard bed.

He instinctively stretched out his arms: his right hand encountered a rough and damp stone wall.

He rose and groped cautiously about him;—but it required not many moments to convince him of the terrible though mysterious truth—that he was the inmate of a narrow dungeon!

But where was he thus imprisoned?

Who were the authors of this outrage?

And for what purpose was he made a captive?

These three queries defied all conjecture; and the young nobleman was left to the darkness of his dungeon and the gloom of his meditations.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A PAINFUL INTERVIEW.

WE must now go back a few hours—only to the morning of this eventful day—in order to describe the interview which Mr. Clarence Villiers had with his respectable aunt Mrs. Slingsby, at her residence in Old Burlington Street.

He called at her abode as early as nine o'clock,—for he had passed a sleepless night, in consequence of the communication made to him by the individual whom he as yet knew only as Captain Sparks, and of whose arrest on the preceding night he was as yet ignorant.

Mrs. Slingsby, Adelaïs, and Rosamond were seated at breakfast in a comfortable little parlour, when Clarence was announced.

At first his appearance at so unusual an hour and when he was supposed to be on his way to his office in Somerset House, excited some alarm, lest he had bad news to communicate; and the sisters already trembled for fear their father had discovered their abode. But he speedily reassured them by declaring that he intended to give himself a holiday that morning, and had therefore come to join them at the breakfast-table.

"You are welcome, Clarence," said Mrs. Slingsby, while Adelaïs appeared so pleased at this unexpected visit that the enhanced carnation tinge of her cheeks and the joy that flashed in her fine eyes rendered her transcendently beautiful.

But Rosamond seemed pensive and even melancholy—although she endeavoured to smile and appear gay.

"I had a visit from Captain Sparks last evening," observed Clarence. "He is going to America, and he called to take leave of me, as well as to entrust me with some little commission, which I of course undertook."

"And we heard a most wholesome and beneficial discourse from the Reverend Mr. Sawkins," observed Mrs. Slingsby.

"Was Mr. Sheepshanks present?" inquired Villiers, without looking at his aunt, and apparently intent only on carving the ham.

"My dear Clarence," said Mrs. Slingsby in a serious, reproachful tone, "your question is light and inconsiderate. You doubtless intended it as a jest, but the object to which it refers is one painfully calculated to wound those who have the good cause at heart. Mr. Sheepshanks has conducted himself in a manner that has produced the most lively grief as well as the greatest astonishment in what may be strictly termed the religious world. Sir Henry Courtenay was shocked when I narrated the incident to him."

"Oh! Sir Henry was shocked, was he?" exclaimed Clarence. "Well, for my part, I should have conceived that a man of fashion would have cared very little for all the Sheepshanks' and Sawkins' in the universe."

"Clarence!" said Mrs. Slingsby, "what is the matter with you this morning? There seems to be an unusual flippancy in your observations——"

"Not at all, my dear aunt. Only, I conceive that a man who is fond of gaiety—who goes to parties—mixes with the *élite* of the West End, and so on, can have but little time to devote to the interests of Cannibal-Clothing Associations."

"My dear nephew, you astonish me!" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby. "Is it to affix a vulgar nick-name to an admirable institution, that you call it a Cannibal-Clothing Association? I once thought you had some degree of respect for the philanthropic and religious establishments which are the boast and ornament of your native land. But——"

"My dear aunt, pardon me if I have offended you," said Clarence—let in a cool and indifferent tone. "I really forgot at the moment the name of the institution to which that arrant hypocrite and scoundrel Sheepshanks belonged."

"Use not such harsh words, Clarence," enjoined Mrs. Slingsby, who knew not what to think of her nephew's unusual manner and discourse. "Mr. Sheepshanks has lost himself in the estimation of all persons of rightly constituted minds; but the Christian spirit of forgiveness commands us to be lenient in our comments on the actions even of the wicked."

"That may be," said Clarence. "But as I read the account in the newspapers, it certainly looked so black against this Sheepshanks, that had he been sent to Newgate, he would have had no more than his due. Now, my opinion is this:—robbery is always a heinous crime, but he who robs his fellow-creatures under the cloak of religion, is an atrocious sinner indeed. Hypocrisy, my dear aunt, is a detestable vice; and you, as a woman of sound sense and discerning judgment, must admit the truth of my observation. But we were talking of Sir Henry Courtenay."

"You must not utter a word against him," said Adelaïs, in the most artless manner possible; "for Rosamond has conceived so high an opinion of him——"

"Because dear Mrs. Slingsby has represented his virtues—his mental qualifications—his admirable character to me in terms which make me as enthusiastic as herself in extolling so good and amiable a man," exclaimed Rosamond, speaking with an ardour which was the more striking, because the natural purity of her soul prevented her from seeing the necessity of checking it.

Mrs. Slingsby coloured and glanced uneasily towards her nephew, who did not, however, appear to notice that the conversation had taken a turn which was disagreeable to her.

In fact, the suspicions originally excited in his mind by the communications of the preceding evening, were now materially strengthened; and the more he contemplated the character of his aunt, the more transparent became the film that had so long blinded him as to its real nature.

"And so you are a great admirer of Sir Henry Courtenay, Rosamond?" he said, endeavouring to maintain as calm and placid an exterior as possible.

"Rosamond is fully aware that virtue deserves respect, wherever it exists," returned Mrs. Slingsby hastily.

"And Sir Henry Courtenay is the pattern of all virtue, dear madam—is he not?" exclaimed Rosamond.

"He is a very good man, my dear, as I have frequently assured you," said the pious widow. "But let us change a conversation which does not appear agreeable to Clarence!"

"I would not for the world manifest so much selfishness," observed Villiers, coolly, "as to quit a topic which gives so much gratification to Rosamond."

mond. At the same time—as the future husband of Adelaïs, and therefore soon to be your brother-in-law, dear Rosamond—I must warn you against conceiving extravagant notions of the integrity and immaculate virtue of any man who belongs to what is called the Fashionable World.”

“But dear Mrs. Slingsby has assured me, Clarence,” ejaculated Rosamond, warmly, “that Sir Henry Courtenay is an exception to the general rule—that he is the very pattern of every thing generous and good—and that no one could err in following his advice, whatever it might be. Oh! I can assure you—”

Rosamond stopped short; for Mrs. Slingsby, seeing that her nephew’s countenance was becoming purple with indignation as the artless girl thus gave vent to the enthusiasm excited in her soul by the most insidious representations,—Mrs. Slingsby, we say, had touched her with her foot beneath the table—a movement naturally construed by Rosamond into a hint to cut short her observations.

“You can retire, dear girls,” said Mrs. Slingsby. “I wish to have a little conversation with Clarence.”

“Do not keep us away long, dear madam,” exclaimed Adelaïs, in a playful manner, as she rose to quit the room with her sister.

Clarence and Mrs. Slingsby were now alone together; and the position of each was a most painful one.

The aunt saw that something was wrong; and her guilty conscience excited a thousand vague fears within her bosom; while the nephew felt convinced that the relative, whom he had hitherto loved and respected, was worthy only of his abhorrence and contempt.

There was a long pause in the conversation after the sisters had left the room; but at length the silence, so irksome to both nephew and aunt, was broken by the latter.

“Clarence—something appears to have vexed—to have annoyed you this morning,” she observed, in a tremulous tone.

“Do you know,” he said, turning abruptly round towards her, and fixing a searching glance upon her countenance, “that you act most unwisely—most indiscreetly—nay, most incorrectly, to expatiate so much upon the virtues of Sir Henry Courtenay? When I first entered the room this morning, I found Rosamond pensive and thoughtful; and she said not a word until that man’s name was mentioned, when she became as it were enthusiastic in his defence, although no actual attack was made by me upon his character. What is the meaning of this strange conduct?”

“Clarence—if, in my respect for Sir Henry Courtenay—I have been too warm in my praises of his character,—if—”

“Aunt, there is no supposition in the case,” interrupted Villiers, almost sternly. “You have been too warm—and heaven only knows with what object! God forbid that I should impute the worst motives to your conduct in this respect: but a dreadful suspicion has been excited in my mind—”

“A suspicion!” murmured Mrs. Slingsby faintly, while the glance which she threw upon her nephew was full of uneasiness.

“Yes—a suspicion!” he repeated; “and most painful—oh! most painful is it to me to be compelled to address you in this manner. But the case is too serious to allow me to remain silent. In one

word, have you not made an impression on the mind of that artless girl which may endanger her peace?—have you not been encouraging in her breast an admiration for a man old enough to be her grandfather—an admiration which is not natural, and which is calculated to inspire her with feelings towards a sexagenarian dandy—”

“Clarence!” exclaimed the pious lady, in a hysterical manner; “how dare you address me in this dictatorial tone? Would you seek to invest my conduct in bestowing well-merited praise on a good man, with an aspect so black—”

“Your indignation is well feigned!” cried Villiers, his lips quivering with rage. “But the day of deception has passed—hypocrisy shall no longer impose upon me. If I accuse you unjustly, I will grovel as an abject wretch at your feet to manifest my contrition. Before I thus debase myself, however, you must prove to me that you are indeed the noble-minded—the open-hearted—the immaculate woman I have so long loved and revered! Tell me, then, the real—the true history of that night when a boy was received into this house through charity—a few years ago—”

Mrs. Slingsby became as pale as death, and sat gazing with haggard eyes upon her nephew—unable to avert her glance, and yet shrinking from his.

“Then you are guilty, madam,” he said, after a few moments’ pause; “and the excellent—the virtuous—the upright Sir Henry Courtenay is your lover! My God! did the world ever know hypocrisy so abominable—so black as this?”

These words were uttered with extreme bitterness—and Mrs. Slingsby burst into a flood of tears, while she covered her face with her hands.

Clarence possessed a generous heart; and this sight moved him.

“My dear aunt,” he said, “I do not wish to mortify you—much less to humiliate you in my presence. In your own estimation you must necessarily be humiliated enough. Neither will I dwell at any length upon the pain—the intense grief which I experience in finding you so different from what I have ever believed you to be—until now,” he added, in a mournful tone. “Were you my sister, or did you stand with reference to me in a degree of relationship that would permit me to remonstrate and advise, I should perhaps both reproach and counsel you. But it would ill become a nephew to address his aunt in such a manner.”

“Clarence, will you expose me? will you ruin me?” demanded Mrs. Slingsby, in a hysterical tone.

“Not for worlds would I injure you!” ejaculated the young man. “But I must receive no more favours at your hands! Here—take back the money which you gave me a few days ago. Thank God! I have not yet expended any of it—and the arrangements I had made to furnish a house for the reception of my Adelaïs, can be countermanded. She will not object to share a lodging with me—until, by my own honest exertions,” he added proudly, “I may be able to give her a suitable home.”

And, as he spoke, he cast a roll of Bank-notes upon the table.

“Oh! Clarence—if I have been weak—frail—culpable,” cried the widow, “you are at least severe and cruel; for I have ever done all I could to serve your interests.”



"Were I to express my real opinion on that head," answered Villiers, "I might grieve you still more than I have already done. A bandage has fallen from my eyes—and I can now understand how necessary an instrument of publicity I have been for your assumed virtues; but, in the name of God! let us argue the point no further; for sincerely—sincerely do I assert my unwillingness to give you additional pain. Pardon me, however, if I declare how impossible it is—how inconsistent it would be—to leave those innocent girls in a dwelling which is visited by such a man as that Sir Henry Courtenay."

"How could you remove them elsewhere, without exposing me, Clarence?" demanded his aunt in an imploring tone. "What explanation can you or I give them, to account in a reasonable manner for the suddenness of such a step?"

Villiers paced the room in an agitated manner.

He knew not how to act.

To leave Adelaïs and Rosamond in the society of his aunt was repugnant to his high sense of honour and his correct notions of propriety; and whither to remove them he knew not.

He had seen and heard enough at the breakfast-

table to convince him that Mrs. Slingsby had some sinister motive in creating in the mind of Rosamond,—that innocent, artless mind, which was so susceptible of any impression which a designing woman might choose to make upon it,—a feeling of admiration in favour of the baronet; and although he had to a considerable extent curbed the resentment and the indignation which his aunt's conduct in this respect had aroused within him, still to leave that young maiden any longer within an atmosphere of infection, was impossible! No; he would sooner restore the sisters to their father, and leave to circumstances the realization of his hopes in regard to Adelaïs!

While he was still deliberating within himself what course to pursue, and while Mrs. Slingsby was anxiously watching him as he paced the room with agitated steps, the servant entered with the morning's newspaper.

Clarence took it from the table in a mechanical manner and glanced his eye over the first page; but his thoughts were too painfully pre-occupied to permit him to entertain, even for an instant, any idea of reading the journal.

No:—it was one of those unwitting actions which we often perform when sorely embarrassed or bewildered,—an action without positive motive and without aim.

But how often do the most trivial deeds exercise a paramount influence over our destinies!

And this simple action of glancing at the newspaper proved to be an instance of the kind.

For at the moment when Clarence was about to throw the journal back again upon the table and resume his agitated walk, his eyes encountered an advertisement which instantaneously arrested his attention.

Then, with beating heart and with an expression of joy rapidly spreading itself over his countenance, he read the following lines:—

“To A. AND R.—Your distressed and almost heart-broken father implores you to return to him. The past shall be forgotten on his side; and no obstacle shall be opposed to the happiness of A. Your father is lying on a sick bed, and again implores that this prayer may not be made in vain.”

“God be thanked!” cried Villiers, no longer able to restrain his joy; and handing the newspaper to his aunt, he directed her attention to the advertisement.

“Here is an apology at once for the removal of the young ladies from this house, Clarence,” observed Mrs. Slingsby. “And now that you are saved from the embarrassment in which you were plunged but a few minutes back, will you promise never—never to reveal—and, if possible, to forget—”

“You allude to your conduct towards Rosamond?” said Villiers. “Tell me its motive—and I swear solemnly—”

“In one word, then,” interrupted his aunt, “let Rosamond beware of Sir Henry Courtenay! And now answer me a single question—for I see you are impatient to be gone:—How came you to discover—what meant your allusion—to—to the boy—who was received into this house—”

“I cannot stay to explain all *that*,” cried Villiers. “But rest assured that your character stands no chance of being made the subject of scandalous talk—unless, indeed, your future actions—”

“Enough, Clarence!” exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby. “I know that you must despise me: but spare me any farther humiliation!”

She then rang the bell, and desired the servant to summon Adelaïs and Rosamond.

We need not pause to describe the joy which those fair beings experienced when Clarence showed them the advertisement inviting them to return home; although tears immediately afterwards started into their eyes, when they read that their father was upon a bed of sickness.

They once more retired to their bed-chamber to prepare their toilette for departure; and, when a hackney-coach drove round to the door, they took leave of Mrs. Slingsby with demonstrations of gratitude which struck to her heart like a remorse.

Clarence accompanied them back to the cottage; and his heart palpitated violently—he scarcely knew wherefore—when he assisted them to alight.

The front door was opened by the female servant, who uttered a cry of joy on beholding the young ladies once more; and with trembling steps Adelaïs and Rosamond entered the parlour, followed by Clarence.

To their surprise—and, at first, to their great delight—the sisters found themselves, on crossing the threshold of the room, in the presence of their father, who was looking pale, it was true—but with concentrated anger, and not with illness.

Adelaïs and Rosamond fell on their knees before him, exclaiming, “Forgive us, dear father—forgive us!”

“How am I to receive you, Adelaïs?” he asked in a cold voice: “as Miss Torrens—or as—”

“As Miss Torrens at present, sir,” answered Clarence stepping forward, and speaking in a firm though respectful tone. “But, in accordance with the promise held out in that advertisement which appears in to-day’s journal, I hope that your elder daughter will soon be mine—and with your permission and blessing also.”

“Where have my daughters been residing during their absence, sir?” inquired Mr. Torrens, without appearing to notice the latter portion of Villiers’ observations.

“Under the protection of a female relative of mine, sir,” answered Clarence, with increasing misgivings at the cold demeanour of the father of his beloved.

“Thank you for the information, sir,” said Mr. Torrens, with a smile of triumph. “At least you have so far disarmed my resentment, that you have brought me back my daughter pure and innocent as when you enticed her away, with the aid of a villainous robber.”

“A robber!” ejaculated Clarence indignantly.

“Yes, sir,” continued Mr. Torrens, in a sneering tone; “your worthy colleague, Captain Sparks, is a common highwayman—a thief—properly named Thomas Rainford; and at this moment he is a prisoner in Horsemonger Lane Gaol. Scarcely ten minutes have elapsed since I received a note from Mr. Howard, a solicitor, informing me of the fact.”

Clarence was so astounded by this announcement, that for a few moments he could make no reply, and the young ladies, who had in the meantime slowly risen from their suppliant posture and were now standing timidly by their father’s side, exchanged glances of painful surprise.

“Yes,” resumed Mr. Torrens in a stern and severe tone, “that man, who aided you to effect the abduction of these disobedient girls, is a common highwayman—and you could not be ignorant of that fact!”

“As I live, sir,” ejaculated Clarence, at length recovering the power of speech, “I *was* ignorant of the fact; and even now—But,” he added, correcting himself, “I cannot doubt your word! At the same time, permit me to assure you that I had never seen him until that night—”

“I require no farther explanation, sir,” interrupted Mr. Torrens. “My daughters are now once more under the paternal roof—inveigled back again, it is true, by a stratagem on my part—”

“A stratagem!” repeated Clarence, while Adelaïs uttered a faint shriek, and sank weeping into her sister’s arms.

“Yes—a stratagem, sir!” ejaculated Mr. Torrens. “And now learn my decision, Mr. Villiers! Sooner than she shall become your wife,” he continued, pointing towards the unhappy girl, “I would give her to the meanest hind who toils for his daily bread. Depart, sir!—this house is at least a place where my authority can alone prevail!”

"Mr. Torrens—I beseech—I implore you—" began the wretched young man, whose hopes were thus suddenly menaced so cruelly.

"Depart, sir!" thundered the angry father; "or I shall use violence—and we will then see whether you will strike in return the parent of her whom you affect to love!"

And he advanced towards Villiers in a menacing manner.

"I will not stay to irritate you, sir," said Clarence, feeling as if his heart were ready to burst. "Adelais—remember one who will never cease to remember you! Rosamond, farewell!"

Mr. Torrens became more and more impatient; and Villiers quitted the house with feelings as different from those which had animated him when he entered it, as the deepest despair is different from the most joyous hope.

But the anguish of his heart was not greater than that which now filled the bosom of her from whom he was so unexpectedly and cruelly separated.

CHAPTER L.

THE LAWYER'S OFFICE.

A FEW days after the events just related, the following scene took place at Mr. Howard's office in Golden Square.

It was about four in the afternoon, and the lawyer was seated in his private room, at a table covered with papers, when a clerk entered and announced that Sir Christopher Blunt and his lady had just arrived.

"His lady with him—eh!" exclaimed the solicitor. "Well—show them in at once."

And, accordingly, in a few minutes the worthy knight, with Charlotte—or, we beg her pardon, Lady Blunt—hanging upon his arm, entered the office.

The old gentleman was all smiles—but the quick eye of Mr. Howard immediately perceived that they were to some extent forced and feigned; and that beneath his jaunty aspect there was not altogether the inward contentment, much less the lightsome glee, of a happy bridegroom.

As for Lady Blunt—she was attired in the richest manner, and in all the colours of the rainbow,—looking far too gaudy to be either genteel or fashionable.

"My dear Sir Christopher, I am quite charmed to see you" exclaimed Mr. Howard, rising to welcome his client and the bride. "Your ladyship—"

"Yes—this is my loving and beloved Lady Blunt, Howard," said the knight pompously: "a delightful creature, I can assure you—and who has vowed to devote herself to my happiness."

"Come now, you great stupid!" said the lady; "finish your business here, and let us see about the new carriage. Of all places in the world, I hate a lawyer's office—ever since I was once summoned to a Court of Conscience for seventeen shillings and ninepence-halfpenny, and had to call on the thief of an attorney to get him to take it by instalments of sixpence a-week. So, you see, I can't a-bear the lawyers. No offence, sir," she added, turning towards Mr. Howard; "but I always speak my mind; and I think it's best."

"My dear creature—my sweet love!" ejaculated

Sir Christopher, astounded at this outbreak of petulance on the part of his loving and beloved wife.

"Pray do not distress yourself, my dear Sir Christopher," said the lawyer. "We are accustomed to receive sharp rebukes from the ladies sometimes," he added, with as courteous a smile as he could possibly manage under the circumstances. "But pray be seated. Will your ladyship take this chair?"—and he indicated the one nearest to the fire.

Lady Blunt quitted her husband's arm, but made an imperious sign for him to bring his chair close to hers; and he obeyed her with a submission which left no doubt in the lawyer's mind as to the empire already asserted by the bride.

"I am very glad you have called to-day, Sir Christopher," said the lawyer; "for—"

"He could n't very well come before, sir," interrupted Lady Blunt; "because we only came back from the matrimony trip last night."

Mr. Howard bowed, and was preparing to continue, when the knight exclaimed, "My dear sir, what is all this to-do about the highwayman who robbed me of the two thousand pounds? I thought I told you so particularly that I would rather no steps should be taken in the matter; and now—the moment I come back to town—"

"Instead of having all our time to ourselves, to gad about cozie together," again interrupted Lady Blunt, "we are forced to come bothering here at a lawyer's office."

"The ends of justice must be met, Lady Blunt," said Mr. Howard drily. "In consequence of particular information which I received, I caused this Thomas Rainford to be apprehended; and I appeal to Sir Christopher himself—who has served the high office of Sheriff—"

"And once stood as a candidate for the aldermanic gown of Portsoken, until I was obliged to cut those City people," added the knight, drawing himself up.

"And why should you cut the City people?" demanded his wife. "For my part, I'd sooner see the Lord Mayor's show than Punch and Judy any day; and that's saying a great deal—for no one can be more fonder of Punch and Judy than me."

"My dear Charlotte," exclaimed the knight, who now seemed to be sitting on thorns, "you—"

"Charlotte at home—Lady Blunt in public, Sir Christopher—if you please," interrupted the bride. "But pray let Mr. Howard get to the end of this business."

"Well, my dear," exclaimed Sir Christopher, "if it annoys you, why would you come? I assured you how unusual it was for ladies to accompany their husbands to the office of their solicitors—"

"Oh! I dare say, Sir Christopher!" cried Charlotte. "You do n't think that I'm going to trust you out of my sight, do you now? I'm not quite such a fool as you take me for. Why, even when we are walking along the street together, I can see your wicked old eye fixed on the gals—"

"Lady Blunt!" exclaimed the knight, becoming literally purple; "you—you—you do me an injustice!"

"So much the better. I hope I am wrong—for both of our sakes," returned her ladyship. "Depend upon it—But, no matter now: let Mr. Howard get on with his story."

"With your permission, madam, I shall be do-

lighted to do so," said the lawyer. "I was observing just now that having received particular information, I caused this scoundrel Thomas Rainford, *alias* Captain Sparks, to be apprehended; and on Monday morning, Sir Christopher, you must attend before the magistrate to give your evidence."

"But who authorised you to proceed in this affair, Mr. Howard?" demanded the knight.

"What a strange question?" exclaimed the lawyer, evidently unwilling to give a direct answer to it. "Only reflect for a moment, my dear Sir Christopher. A robbery is committed—you, your nephew, and myself are outwitted—laughed at—set at defiance,—and when an opportunity comes in my way, I very naturally adopt the best measures to punish the rogue."

"Quite proper too, sir," said Lady Blunt. "The idea of any one daring to laugh at Sir Christopher! I'd scratch the villain's eyes out, if I had him here. To laugh at Sir Christopher, indeed! Does he look like a man who is meant to be laughed at?"

Lady Blunt could not have chosen a more unfortunate opportunity to ask this question; for her husband at that moment presented so ludicrous an appearance, between his attempts to look pleasant and his fears lest he already seemed a henpecked old fool in the eyes of his solicitor, that a man possessing less command over himself than Mr. Howard would have laughed outright.

But with the utmost gravity in the world, the lawyer assured her ladyship that nothing could be more preposterous than to laugh at a gentleman of Sir Christopher Blunt's rank and importance; and he also declared that in arresting Thomas Rainford, he had merely felt a proper anxiety to punish one who had dared to ridicule the knight, after having robbed him.

Lady Blunt was one of those capricious women who will laugh at their husbands either as a matter of pastime or for the purpose of manifesting their own independence and predominant sway, but who cannot bear the idea of any other person taking a similar liberty. She therefore expressed her joy that Mr. Howard had caused Rainford to be apprehended, and declared, of her own accord, that Sir Christopher should attend to give his evidence on the ensuing Monday—"for she would go with him!"

"Well, my dear, since such is your pleasure," observed the knight, "there is no more to be said upon the subject. I *will* go, my love; and I think that when the magistrate hears my evidence, he will feel convinced that I know pretty well how to aid the operation of the laws, and that I have not been a Sheriff for nothing. Although sprung from a humble origin—"

"Oh! pray do not begin that nonsense, Sir Christopher!" exclaimed the lady; "or I shall faint. It is really quite sickening."

At that moment the door opened somewhat violently; and Mr. Frank Curtis entered the room.

"Ah! Sir Christopher, my jolly old cock—how are you?" exclaimed that highly respectable young gentleman, whose face was dreadfully flushed with drinking, and who smelt so strong of cigars and rum-punch that his presence instantly produced the most overpowering effect.

"Mr. Curtis!" began the knight, rising from his chair, and drawing himself up to his full height, "I—"

"Come—it's no use to be grumpy over it, uncle," interrupted Frank. "Matrimony does not seem to agree with you very well, since you're so soon put out of humour. Ah! my dear Char—my dear aunt, I mean—beg your pardon—quite a mistake, you know;—but really you look charming this afternoon."

"Get out with you, do!" cried Lady Blunt, who was somewhat undecided how to treat Mr. Curtis.

"What! does not matrimony agree with you, either, my dear and much respected aunt?" ejaculated Frank. "Why, I once knew a lady who was in a galloping consumption—given up, in fact, and the undertaker who lived over the way had already begun to make her coffin—for he knew he should have the order for the funeral; when all of a sudden a young chap fell in love with her, married her, and took her to the south of France—where I've been, by the bye—and brought her home in six months quite recovered, and in a fair way to present him with a little one—a pledge of affection, as it's called."

"Mr. Curtis, I am surprised at you," exclaimed Sir Christopher, in a pompous and commanding tone;—"to talk in this way before a lady who has only recently passed through that trying ordeal."

"I'll be bound to say it was not so recent as you suppose, old buck," cried Frank, staggering against the lawyer's table.

"Sir, Lady Blunt has only been recently—very recently married, as you are well aware," said the knight sternly. "And now let me tell you, sir, that the detestable devices schemed by Miss Mordaunt and you have recoiled upon yourselves—"

"Miss Mordaunt and me!" exclaimed Frank, now unfeignedly surprised: "why—I never spoke to Miss Mordaunt in my life!"

"The monster!" half screamed Lady Blunt.

"The audacious liar!" vociferated the knight.

"Pretty names—very pretty," said Frank coolly; "but I'm rather tough, thank God! and so they won't kill me this time. But I can assure you, uncle, you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick when you say that me and Miss Mordaunt planned any thing against you. As I once observed to my friend the Count of St. Omers, 'My lord,' says I, 'What?' asks the Marquis, 'My Lord Duke,' I repeated, in a firmer tone—"

"Cease this nonsense, Mr. Curtis," interrupted Sir Christopher Blunt sternly.

"Yes—and let us come along, my dear," said Lady Blunt, rising and taking her husband's arm. "Your navy does smell so horrid of rum and cigars—"

"And very good things too," cried Frank; "ain't they, Howard? Me and a party of young fashionables have been keeping it up a bit to-day at my lodgings—on the strength of my intended marriage with Mrs. Goldberry, the rich widow—"

"Your marriage, Frank!" exclaimed Sir Christopher. "What—how—when—"

"Lord bless you, my dear uncle," said Mr. Curtis, swaying himself to and fro in a very extraordinary manner, "you don't half know what kind of a fellow I am. While you was away honeymooning and nonsense—"

"Nonsense, indeed!" exclaimed Lady Blunt, indignantly. "Come, Sir Christopher—it's no good staying here talking to Mr. Imperance."

"Going to Conduit Street—eh, aunt?"

Frank, with a drunken leer. "But, by-the-bye, you regularly choused me out of five guineas, you know, aunty—and something else, too——"

"Eh?—what?" said Sir Christopher, turning back. "Mr. Curtis, do you dare to accuse Lady Blunt——"

"Of having made a very great fool of me, but a much bigger one of you, old fellow," added Frank; and, snapping his fingers in his uncle's face, he exclaimed, "I don't care a penny for you, Sir Christopher! In a few days I shall marry Mrs. Goldberry—you are very welcome to be as happy as you can with your Abigail there. So remember, we're cuts in future, Sir Christopher—since you want to come the bumptious over me."

The knight was about to reply; but his better-half drew him hastily away from the lawyer's office, saying, "Come along, you great stupid! What's the use of staying to dispute with that feller?"

The door closed behind the "happy couple;" and Mr. Frank Curtis, throwing himself into the chair which Lady Blunt had just quitted, burst out into a tremendous fit of laughter.

"You have gone too far, Frank—a great deal too far," said the lawyer, shaking his head disapprovingly. "Sir Christopher has been a good friend to you; and although he has committed an egregious error in running off with that filly, still——"

"What do I care?" interrupted Frank. "I proposed to Mrs. Goldberry yesterday—and she accepted me, after a good deal of simpering and blushing, and so on. She's got five thousand a year, and lives in splendid style in Baker Street. I made her believe that I was n't quite a beggar myself—but all's fair in love and war, as my friend the late Prince of St. Omers used to say in his cups. But what about this fellow Rainford? and how the deuce did he come to be arrested?"

"I received information of his residence," answered Howard coolly; "and I gave him into custody accordingly."

"It's very odd," continued Frank, "but I met him last Sunday night; and I don't mind telling you that we went into the middle of Hyde Park and had an hour's wrestling together, to see who was the better man. I threw him nineteen times running, and he threw me seven; then I threw him three times—and he gave in. So we cried 'quits' for old scores, and I gave him my word and honour that nothing would ever be done against him in respect to the little affair of the two thousand pounds. You may therefore suppose that I'm rather vexed——"

"The officers had already received instructions to apprehend him at the time your *alleged* wrestling match came off," said the lawyer; "and your evidence will be required next Monday morning."

"And I suppose the whole affair of the robbery will come out?" observed Curtis interrogatively.

"Decidedly so. You must state the exact truth—if you can," added Mr. Howard.

"If I can! Damn it, old fellow, that observation is not quite the thing—coming from you; and if any body else had uttered it, egad! I'd send him a hostile message to-morrow morning—as I did to my most valued friend, the Marquis of Boulogne, when I was in Paris. I'll just tell you how that was——"

"Not now Frank," interrupted the lawyer; "because I am very busy. It's getting on for post time

—and I have not a minute to spare. But mind and be punctual at the Borough police-office on Monday morning at ten."

"Well—if I must, I must," said Curtis. "But, after all, I think it's rather too bad—for this Sparks, or Rainford, or whatever his name is, seems a good kind of fellow, after all."

"The law must take its course, Frank," observed the attorney in an abrupt, dry manner.

Curtis accordingly took his leave, and returned to his lodgings, where by dint of cold water applied outwardly and soda-water taken inwardly, he endeavoured to sober himself sufficiently to pay a visit to Mrs. Goldberry.

For it was literally true that there *was* such a lady—that she lived in splendid style in Baker Street—that Frank had proposed to her—and that he had been accepted;—but we have deemed it necessary to give the reader these corroborative assurances on our part, inasmuch as the whole tale would otherwise have appeared nothing more nor less than one of the innumerable children of Mr. Curtis's fertile imagination.

CHAPTER LI.

LORD ELLINGHAM IN THE DUNGEON.

FOUR weeks had elapsed since the arrest of Tom Rain and the extraordinary adventure which had snatched the Earl of Ellingham from the great world and plunged him into a narrow—noisome cell.

Yes—four weeks had the nobleman languished in the terrible dungeon,—ignorant of where his prison-house was situated—why his freedom was thus outraged—and who were his persecutors.

Every morning, at about eight o'clock, a small trap in the door of his cell was opened, and food was passed through to him. A lamp had been given him the day after he became an inmate of the place; and oil was regularly supplied for the maintenance of the light. His food was good, and wine accompanied it;—it was therefore evident that no petty spite nor mean malignity had led to his captivity.

Indeed, the man who brought him his food assured him that no harm would befall him,—that his imprisonment was necessary to suit certain weighty and important interests, but that it would not be protracted beyond a few weeks,—and that the only reason for placing him in such a dungeon was because it was requisite to guard against the possibility of an escape.

Often and often had Lord Ellingham endeavoured to render his gaoler more communicative; but the man was not to be coaxed into garrulity. Neither did he ever allow the nobleman to catch a glimpse of his features, when he brought the food to the trap-door. He invariably stood on one side, and spoke in a feigned tone when replying to any question to which he did vouchsafe an answer.

The day after his strange and mysterious arrest, Arthur received from this man the assurances above mentioned; and a considerable weight was thereby removed from his mind. His imprisonment was not to be eternal: a few weeks would see the term of the necessity that had caused it. But still he grieved—nay, felt shocked to think of the state of suspense in which those who cared for him would remain during his long absence. The source of affliction he mentioned to the man who attended

upon him; and the reply was to some extent satisfactory.

"I will supply you with writing materials, and you can address letters to your friends, stating that sudden business has called you abroad—to France, for instance; and that you may probably be absent six weeks. Write in this manner—the excuse will at least allay any serious fears that may be entertained concerning you; and those letters shall be sent through the post to the persons to whom they are addressed. But you must deliver them unsealed into my hands, that I may satisfy myself as to the real nature of their contents."

Small as the satisfaction resulting from this proceeding could be to Lord Ellingham, it was still far preferable to the maintenance of a rigid silence in respect to his friends. He accordingly wrote a laconic letter in the sense suggested by his gaoler; and addressed copies to Lady Hatfield, Thomas Rainford, and Mr. de Medina. The next time his gaoler visited him—or rather, came to the door of the dungeon, the prisoner was informed that the three letters had been duly forwarded through the two-penny post.

The reader will scarcely require to be informed of the mental anxiety which the nobleman suffered during his incarceration. This was naturally great—very great. He was also frequently plunged in the most bewildering conjectures relative to the authors, the motives, and the locality of his imprisonment. Nor less did he grieve—Oh! deeply grieve, when he thought of the surprise—the alarm—and the sorrow with which Lady Hatfield on one side and Rainford on the other must view his mysterious absence. He had left the former with the intention of seeing the latter, and she would naturally expect him to return if for no other reason than to give her an account of their interview; and he had quitted Rainford with the promise to perform a certain task, and also having pledged himself to use his influence and his wealth in his behalf.

The idea of the feelings that must be entertained by Rainford relative to his absence, afflicted him more than any other. That generous-hearted man had told him to keep his coronet and his fortune to the prejudice of him—the *elder brother, legitimately born*; and yet that interview in Horsemonger Lane Gaol seemed destined to be the last which they were to have together! What would the poor prisoner think when the Earl returned not, and when a letter containing a cold and wretched excuse was put into his hands? Oh! this was the maddening—maddening thought; and the Earl shrank from it far more appalled than from the stern reality of his dungeon! Because Rainford might be judged, and, alas! the law might take its course—its fatal course—ere he, the Earl, could stretch out a hand to save that generous-hearted half-brother.

But amidst all the bitter and bewildering reflections which tormented him during his imprisonment of four weeks in that dungeon of unknown neighbourhood, there was still a predominant idea—a gleam of hope, which, apart from the assurance that his captivity would soon have a term, cheered and animated him often.

For whither will not the rays of Hope penetrate? Even when Hope is really gone, her work is often done by Despair; and the latter feeling, in its extreme, is thus often akin to Hope herself.

The hope, then, that cheered and animated the Earl at times, was—**ESCAPE!**

Yes: he yearned to quit that dungeon, not so much for his own sake—oh! not nearly so much, as for that of his half-brother, who was involved in such peril, and who needed influence and interest to save him! For the Earl well knew that the law in criminal cases is not so tardy as in civil matters; and that to take away a man's life, all its machinery is set into rapid motion—although to settle his claims to a fortune or to give him justice against his neighbour it is, heaven knows! heart-breaking slow and wearisome!

To send a man to the scaffold, takes but a few weeks at the Old Bailey:—to decide the right of this man or that man to a particular estate, or legacy, occupies years and years in the Court of Chancery. Oh! how thirsty do our legislators appear to drink human blood. How rapidly all technicalities and causes of delay are cleared away when the capital offender stands before his judge! A day—perhaps an hour is sufficient to decide the death of a human being; but half a century may elapse ere the conflicting claims to an acre of land or a few thousand pounds can be settled elsewhere.

And, strange—ah! and monstrous, too, is it, that the man who loses a case in which he sues his neighbour for twenty pounds, may appeal to another tribunal—have a new trial granted—and, losing that also, perhaps obtain a *third* investigation of the point at issue, and thus three verdicts in that beggarly business! But the man who is doomed to die—who loses his case against the criminal prosecutor—cannot appeal to another tribunal. No judges sit solemnly *in banco* for him: *one verdict* is sufficient to take away a life. Away with him to the scaffold! In this great commercial country, twenty pounds—consisting of pieces of paper printed upon and stamped with particular figures—are of more consequence than a being of flesh and blood! What though this being of flesh and blood may have others—a wife and children—dependent on him? No matter! Give him not the chance of a new trial: let one judge and one jury suffice to consign him to the hangman! There can be no appeal—no re-investigation for his case, *although it be a case of life and death*: but away with him to the scaffold!

What blood-thirsty and atrocious monsters have our law-givers been: what cruel, inhuman beings are they still, to perpetuate so abominable—so flagrant—so infamous a state of jurisprudence! For how many have been hanged, though innocent,—their guiltlessness transpiring when it is too late! But there is no court of appeal for the man accused of a capital crime: he is a dog who has got a bad name—and public opinion dooms him to be hanged, days and weeks before the jury is sworn or the judge takes his seat to try him!

And wherefore is not this infamous state of the law, which allows appeals to the case of money-claims, but none to the case of capital accusations,—wherefore is not this state of the law altered? Because our legislators are too much occupied with their own party contentions and strifes;—because they are ever engaged in battling for the Ministerial benches—the "loaves and fishes" of power: because it seems to them of more consequence to decide whether Sir Robert Peel or Lord John Rus-

sell shall be Prime Minister—whether the Conservatives or the Whigs shall hold the reins of power. Or else, gentle reader, the condition of Greece—or Spain—or Turkey,—or even perhaps of Otaheite,—is a matter of far greater importance than the lives of a few miserable wretches in the condemned cells of criminal gaols!

But, in *our* estimation—and we have the misfortune to differ from the legislators of the country—the *life of one of those wretches* is of far greater consequence than the state of tyrant-ridden Greece—the Spanish marriages—the quarrels of the Sultan and his Pachas—or the miserable squabbles of hypocritical English missionaries and a French governor in Taluti. Yes—in *our* estimation, the life of *one* man outweighs all such considerations; and we would rather see half a session of Parliament devoted to the discussion of the grand question of the PUNISHMENT OF DEATH, than one single day of that session given to all the foreign affairs that ever agitated in a Minister's brain.

* * * * *

It was the twenty-eighth day of Lord Ellingham's imprisonment; and it was about six o'clock on the evening of this day.

The nobleman was at work upon the masonry of his dungeon,—his efforts being directed to remove the stones from the immediate vicinity of a small square aperture, or sink in the corner of the cell.

His implements were a knife and fork, and one of the screws of the frame-work of his bed.

But with these he worked arduously.

Nor was this the first day of his labours. No: for twenty-six days had he been toiling—toiling—toiling on, to make an opening into what he believed to be the common sewer,—even at the risk of inundating his dungeon, and thus perishing miserably!

But all those toils, and all that risk, were sustained and encountered for thee, Tom Rain!

Slowly—slowly—slowly had the work progressed; but now—on the twenty-eighth day—Arthur found himself so far advanced that escape from the dungeon was at least open to him.

But escape into what region?

Into those drains and sewers which run beneath the streets of London, and form a maze to which the only clue is a knowledge of the point whence, he, who enters the labyrinth, originally starts! And this clue was not possessed by Arthur; for in what part of London his dungeon was situate, he had not the least idea. It could hardly be said that he was confident of this dungeon being in the metropolis at all;—and yet he had many reasons to believe that it was. For, in the first place, his gaoler had mentioned the fact of his letters having been sent by the *two penny post*; secondly, he had ascertained that his cell was situate in the very vicinity of a common sewer, and sewers were not at that time formed in the villages surrounding the metropolis; and thirdly, he could scarcely believe that those who had arrested him in London, would have run the risk of removing him out of its precincts—for he was well aware that atrocious outrages and diabolical crimes may be perpetrated with greater chances of impunity in the metropolis than elsewhere.

But, although he was, thus tolerably well convinced that his prison-house was within the boundaries of London, he had not the least notion of the

precise locality. And when he had removed sufficient of the massive masonry to form an aperture large enough to permit a full-grown man to pass into the sewer,—and when he heard the muddy, slimy waters gurgling languidly in the depths below, he shuddered, and his blood ran cold—for he thought within himself, “I have heard of men who venture into these places in search of treasures, and who, having wandered for miles and miles beneath the streets of London, have issued safely forth again. But *they* knew whence they started; and thus that starting-post was a clue to guide them in the maze. But *I* know not whether, on entering that slimy shallow, I should turn to the right or to the left,—nor which channels to pursue in that terrible labyrinth!”

Then, ashamed of his fears—reproaching himself for his hesitation, he drank a deep draught of the wine that had been supplied him in the morning; and holding the lamp in one hand, and in the other a stout stick cut from one of the cross-beams that supported the mattress of his bed, he entered the common sewer.

His feet sank down into the thick slime, and the muddy water reached to his knees. There was a nauseous odour in the dreary passage, and the filthy fluid was very thick. These circumstances convinced him that it was low water in the river Thames; and by examining the masonry forming the sides of the sewers, he saw that the tide was running out. He therefore resolved to follow the course of the muddy stream, with the hope that he might at length reach one of the mouths by which the sewers discharge their contents into the river.

Armed with his stick to protect himself against the rats as well as to sound his way so as to escape any hole or abrupt depth that there might chance to be in the bottom of the sewer,—and holding the lamp in his left hand, the great peer of England pursued his appalling path in a channel seven feet wide and beneath a vaulting twelve feet high.

From time to time the sudden rush of a number of vermin along a ledge by the side of the channel, and then the sound of their plunge into the slimy water, startled him to such a degree that he almost dropped his lamp: and then the conviction which flashed to his mind *that if he lost his light, he should be inevitably devoured by those vermin*, caused such a chill to pass through him—as if ice were unexpectedly placed upon his heart—that his courage was oftentimes nearly subdued altogether.

But he thought of his half-brother who had manifested so much generosity towards him,—he thought of her whom he had promised to love as a *sister*,—and he also remembered that were he to retrace his steps, *even if he could find the way back*, he should be returning to a dungeon:—of all this he thought—and he went on—on, in that revolting and perilous maze!

Yes: with lamp held high up, and stick grooving in the filthy mud—stirring up nauseating scours.—on—on went the daring, enterprising, chivalrous nobleman—breathing an infected and almost stifling air,—an air formed of such noxious gases, that it might explode at any moment, ignited by the lamp!

But, hark! what is that rumbling sound—like thunder at a vast distance?

Arthur pauses—and listens.

The truth in a few moments flashed to his mind: he was beneath a street in which vehicles were

moving. Oh! now he felt convinced—even if he had entertained any doubts before—that he was in London.

Watching the progress of the slimy stream, he turned first to the left, up a channel that branched off from the one which he had originally entered;—then he turned to the right into another—the hollow rumbling sounds overhead gradually increasing in volume and power.

Suddenly he beholds a light glancing upon the putrescent surface of the slimy stream through which he is wading knee-deep. That light is half-a-dozen yards in front of him—flickering playfully.

He advances: sounds of footsteps—human footsteps—come down from overhead. He looks up—and, behold! there is a grating in the street above; and through that grating the light of the lamp streams and the sound of the footsteps comes.

He hears voices, too—as the people pass,—the voices of that world from all communication with which he is for the time cut off!

Shall he cry out for assistance? No: a sense of shame prevents him. He would not like to be dragged forth from those filthy depths, in the presence of a curious—gaping—staring crowd. He prefers the uncertainty and the peril of his subterranean path, in the fond hope that it may speedily lead to some safe issue.

The Earl accordingly passed on—disturbing the water on which the light from the street-lamp played,—disturbing, too, the vermin on either side with the splash of the fetid fluid as he waded through it.

But when he had proceeded a dozen yards, he looked back—as if unwilling to quit the vicinity of that grating which opened into the street.

In another moment, however, he conquered his hesitation, and pursued his way in a straight line, without again turning off either to the right or to the left.

Upwards of an hour had elapsed since he had quitted the dungeon—and as yet he had found no issue from that labyrinth of subterranean passages.

Grim terrors already began to assume palpable forms to his imagination, when suddenly he beheld a dim twinkling light, like a faint star, at a great distance ahead.

That light seemed a beacon of hope; and as he drew nearer and nearer, its power increased. At last he saw another twinkling light, struggling as it were betwixt glimmer and gloom;—and then a third—and then a fourth. The air appeared to grow fresher too; and the Earl at length believed that an opening from the maze must be near.

Yes: he was not mistaken! The lights increased in number and intensity; and he was soon convinced that they shone upon the opposite bank of the Thames.

A few minutes more—and all doubt was past!

The fresh breeze from the river fanned his cheek—and, as he reached the mouth of the sewer, and hurled away his lamp, he saw the mighty flood stretched out before him—a bridge spanning its width at a little distance on his left hand.

He knew that bridge;—he recognised it by the pale lustre of the moon—for the evening was clear and fine.

It was Blackfriars Bridge!

Then, from which direction had he come?

Remembering the turnings he had taken, he could

fix upon the district of Clerkenwell as the scene of his late imprisonment. But he did not pause to reflect on a matter now so trivial,—trivial, *because he had escaped, and was once more free!*

It was low water—and a bed of mud received him knee-deep, as he leapt from the mouth of the sewer.

But what cared he for his uncouth and filthy appearance?—*since he had escaped, and was once more free?*

For four weeks his beard had not been shaved, nor his toilette carefully performed; and his hair, too, was long and matted. It was therefore necessary to cleanse himself and change his attire as soon as possible.

Hastening along the muddy margin of the river's bed, he ascended the steps of a wharf, and plunged into the district of Whitefriars. There, selecting the humblest-looking public house he could find, he entered; and, as he had his purse about him (for those who had imprisoned, did not rob him), he was enabled to command the necessaries and attentions which he required. Indeed, the landlord willingly supplied a complete change of linen and a suit of his own clothes to a guest who spared not his gold; and as "mine host" and the Earl happened to be of the same height and equally slender in figure, the garments of the former suited well enough the temporary need of the latter.

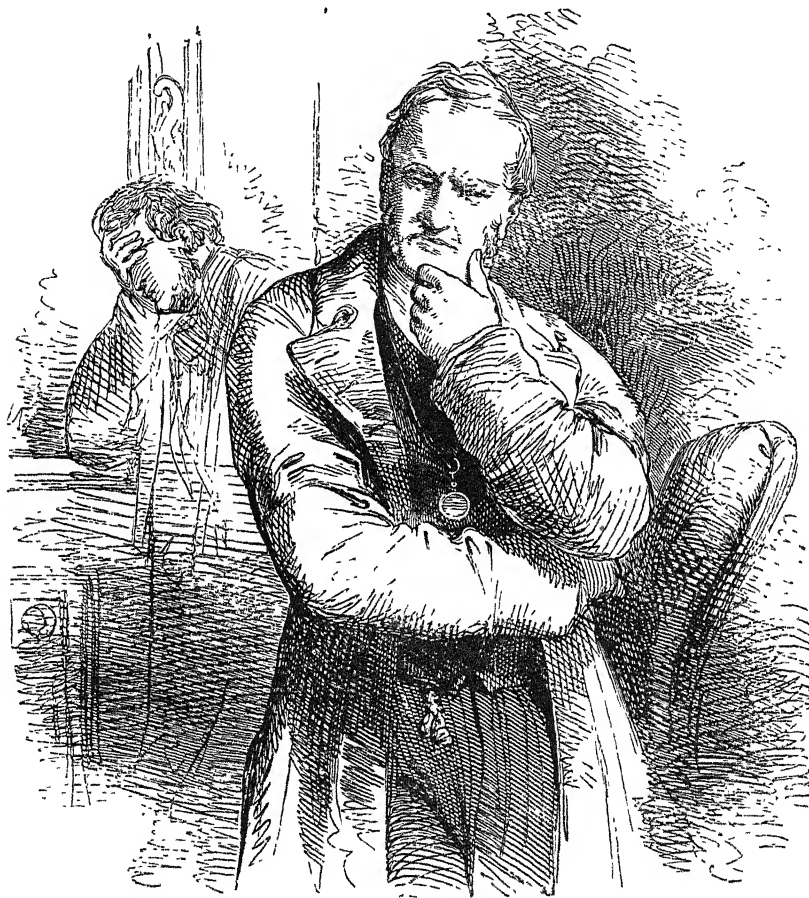
A hundred times, while performing his hasty toilette, was the Earl on the point of summoning the landlord, and making inquiries concerning Tom Rain; but the extraordinary appearance which he himself had worn on entering the public-house, must, he felt convinced, have already engendered strange suspicions concerning him; and prudence suggested to him the necessity of avoiding any conversation which might strengthen these suspicions, and thereby lead him into some embarrassment from which the revelation of his name and rank might alone extricate him.

But, oh! how painful—how acutely painful was the suspense which he endured while passing through the details of ablution and change of attire; and, although never were the duties of the toilette more necessary, yet never had the Earl hurried them over with such feverish excitement.

At length, as St. Paul's Cathedral proclaimed the hour of eight, on that eventful evening, Arthur sallied forth from the public-house—leaving the landlord and landlady a prey to the wildest and most unsatisfactory conjectures as to what he was, and how he had happened to be in the condition in which he at first presented himself at their establishment. They, however, both agreed that it was a very good evening's work for them; inasmuch as their strange guest had paid them with a liberality which would have rendered a similar visit every night of their lives a most welcome God-send.

In the meantime the Earl of Ellingham had gained Fleet Street, with the intention of entering some tavern or hotel where a file of newspapers was kept. But he was struck by the deserted appearance of the great thoroughfare—for the shops were all shut, and the vehicles, instead of pouring in two dense streams running different ways, were few and far between.

It then struck him that it was Sunday evening—for though, in his dungeon, he had been enabled to count the lapse of each day through the date afforded by the morning visits of his gaoler, yet he



had not kept so accurate a calculation as to mark each day by its distinctive name.

As he stood in Fleet Street, uncertain how to proceed, it suddenly struck him that he would purchase a newspaper. The office of the *Weekly Dispatch* was facing him: he entered, and bought that day's number.

Such was his intense curiosity—nay more, his acute and agonising suspense,—and so awful were the misgivings which crowded upon his soul,—that he lingered in the office to glance over the newspaper.

And, my God! how he started—how his brain reeled—how crushed and overwhelmed did he feel, when his eyes encountered the dreadful words at the head of a column—

THE CONVICT RAINFORD.

He staggered against the wainscot of the office, and the journal nearly dropped from his hands. He endeavoured to master his emotions, and refer to the fatal column for farther particulars: but his brain swam—his eyes were dim—his glances could not settle themselves upon the point which he

vainly endeavoured to make the focus of his attention.

The clerk in the office fancied that he was suddenly attacked with indisposition, and made a polite inquiry to that effect. But the Earl, without giving a direct reply, put hasty and impatient questions to him; and, though his ideas were strangely confused, he nevertheless understood the appalling announcement—that *Rainford had been condemned to death and that the sentence was to be carried into execution on the following morning at Horsemonger Lane Gaol*.

The Earl threw down the paper—and darted from the office,—recovered from his state of stupefaction, but only to become the prey to the most maddening feelings of despair.

An empty hackney-coach was passing at the moment: he stopped it, and leapt in—exclaiming to the driver, "To Horsemonger Lane Gaol."

The coachman saw that his fare was impatient to reach that place; and he whipped his horses into a decent pace. Over Blackfriars Bridge—down the wide road went the vehicle: then it turned to the

left at the Obelisk—and, in a short time, it stopped in front of the gaol.

The Earl sprang forth, and was rushing up to the entrance of the governor's house; when an ominous hammering noise fell upon his ears.

He instinctively glanced upwards:—and there—on the top of the gaol—standing out in bold relief against the moon-lit sky, *were the black spars of the gibbet which the carpenters had already erected for the ensuing morning's work!*

CHAPTER LII.

LORD ELLINGHAM'S EXERTIONS.

NOT a cry—not a word—not even a moan betrayed the feelings of the Earl of Ellingham, as this frightful spectacle met his eyes.

He was paralysed—stunned—stupified.

Despair was in his heart;—and he could not lower his glances, which were fascinated—rivetted by that awful engine of death on the summit of the gaol.

This state of complete prostration of all the intellectual energies was suddenly interrupted by a gentle pull at his sleeve; and turning abruptly round, he beheld, by the pale light of the moon, a young lad of sickly appearance standing at his elbow.

"Do you know me? what would you with me?" demanded the Earl sharply.

"Yes—my lord, I know you," was the answer, delivered in a mournful—melancholy tone; "and I also know that good—generous man who—"

The lad burst into an agony of tears, and pointed wildly towards the gibbet.

"Oh! you know Rainford!" exclaimed the Earl eagerly. "Tell me, my boy—speak—have you seen him lately?"

"This day—this evening," replied Jacob Smith—for it was he: "and I have taken leave of him—for ever! He begged me not to visit him—to-morrow—"

"For ever!" echoed the Earl, in a low and hollow voice. "But," he continued, again speaking eagerly and rapidly, "how does he support his doom?"

"With a courage such as the world has seldom seen," replied Jacob: "and he frequently speaks of you, my lord!"

"He speaks of me, my boy—"

"Yes: my lord—he fears that some tidings—some evil reports which you have probably heard, have set you against him—for he received a letter from you a day or two after his arrest—"

"My God! he suspects me of coldness!" exclaimed the Earl, in an impassioned tone. "Oh! I must see him—I must see him this moment—"

And he was rushing towards the governor's door, when Jacob again caught him by the sleeve, saying, "It is useless, my lord! you cannot be admitted to-night."

"The keeper of the prison dare not refuse me," cried the Earl; and he hastened to the door.

"Would it not be better, my lord," asked Jacob, who had followed him, "to use the valuable time now remaining, for the purpose of saving him?"

"True!" exclaimed the Earl, struck by the observation. "An interview with him at this moment

would effect no good, and would only unman me altogether. Come with me, my lad: you take an interest in Rainford—and you shall be the first to learn the result of the application which I will now make in the proper quarter."

Thus speaking, Arthur hurried back to the hackney-coach, and as the door closed upon himself and Jacob, he said to the driver in a firm tone, "To THE HOME-OFFICE!"

During the ride, the Earl put a thousand questions to Jacob Smith relative to the convict.

From the answers he received it appeared that Rainford was well convinced that neither Sir Christopher Blunt nor Mr. Curtis had directed Mr. Howard to prosecute him for the robbery for which he was doomed to suffer: indeed, they had declared as much when giving their evidence at the police-court and at the Old Bailey. Neither did he believe that Howard had instituted the proceedings through any personal motive of spite; but he entertained the conviction that some secret and mysterious springs had been set in motion to destroy him, and that Howard had been made the instrument of the fatal design.

It seemed that Jacob had visited him as often as the prison regulations would permit; and that he had been the bearer of frequent letters between Rainford and the beautiful Jewess, who had removed from Brandon Street a few days after his arrest—this change of residence being effected by the express wishes of Tom Rain, who was afraid lest the malignity of his unknown enemies might extend to herself. Jacob also casually mentioned that the very first time he had been sent to see the Jewess (which appeared to have been the morning after Lord Ellingham's laconic letter was received by Rainford) she enclosed a number of papers in a packet, which she carefully sealed and which Jacob conveyed to the prisoner.

"When I was with him this evening," added the lad, "he gave me that packet, which he re-directed to your lordship, and desired me to leave it at your lordship's residence to-morrow—when all should be over; but since I have thus unexpectedly met you—"

Sobs choked the youth's utterance, as he passed the sealed packet to the Earl, who received it in profound silence—for well did he divine the nature of its contents, and his heart was rent with anguish as he felt all the generosity of that deed on thy part, Tom Rain!

But, in a few moments, the spark of hope that already scintillated within him, was fanned into a bright and glowing flame: for he now possessed proofs to convince the Secretary of State that in allowing the law to take its course, an individual rightly entitled to an Earldom would suffer death; and Arthur was well aware of the influence which such an argument would have in supporting his appeal for a commutation of the sentence.

"Thy generous act in giving up the papers which *thou* mightest have used to save thy life," he thought within himself, apostrophising his doomed half-brother, "shall not be thrown away on me! Ingratitude to thee were impossible!"—Then, turning to Jacob, he said aloud, "I am much mistaken, my boy, if these papers which you have placed in my hands will not effect the great object that we have in view."

"Oh! my lord," exclaimed Jacob, with the most

sincere joyfulness of manner, "is there really so much hope? Ah! if not for him—at least for that poor lady who loves him so deeply——"

"Has she seen him?" hastily inquired the Earl.

"Once—once only," answered Jacob: "and that was this afternoon. I was not present at the farewell scene: but I was in the neighbourhood when she came out again—and I do not wish ever to witness a beautiful woman's grief again. My lord, I have passed through much—seen much,—and distress and misery in all their worst forms are known to me. But as long as I live will the image of that poor creature, as the wind blew aside her veil for a few moments—Oh! I cannot bear to think of it!"

"He shall be restored to her, my lad!" exclaimed the Earl emphatically. "The more I ponder upon the case, the more firmly do I become convinced that it is one in which the Home Secretary may exercise the prerogative of mercy. It is not as if blood had been shed——"

At this moment the hackney-coach stopped at the door of the Home Office; and the Earl alighted, bidding Jacob await his return.

But what language can describe the violence of that sudden revulsion of feeling which Arthur experienced, when, on inquiry, he learnt that the Home Secretary was neither at his official nor his private residence in London, as he had set out on the preceding evening for his country seat in the north of England!

With the rapidity of lightning did the Earl calculate the chances of overtaking him by means of fleet horses: but a few moments' reflection showed him the impossibility of accomplishing that undertaking in time to make its result, supposing it were successful, available to the doomed victim. The reprieve might be granted—but it would arrive in London too late!

The Earl was well aware that it was useless to seek the Prime Minister; as that functionary would have no alternative save to reply that he could not possibly interfere in a case so essentially regarding the department of the Home Secretary.

Arthur's mind was accordingly made up in a very few moments:—he would repair at once to the King, who, as he learnt at the Home Office, was, fortunately for his purpose, at Buckingham Palace!

It was now ten o'clock at night: there were but ten hours before him—but in that interval much might be done.

Returning to the coach, he desired to be driven to his own house; and, while proceeding thither, he acquainted Jacob with the cruel disappointment he had sustained by the absence of the Secretary of State, and stated his resolution to repair at once to the dwelling of the King.

Thus the poor wretched lad became, by his generous sympathy for Tom Rain, the companion and confidant of the great noble!

Great was the joy which prevailed amongst the Earl's household, when he made his appearance once more at his own abode. The servants had indeed heard from Dr. Lascelles as much as the physician himself had learnt through the medium of the vague and laconic letter which the Earl was permitted to write to him from his dungeon but still the protracted absence of their master had occasioned them the most lively uneasiness and

they were therefore heartily glad to behold his return.

But he was compelled to cut short the congratulations proffered him; and the orders that he issued were given with an unwonted degree of impatience.

"Let the carriage be ordered round directly. Let some one hasten to acquaint Lady Hatfield with my return; and also send up to Grafton Street to request Dr. Lascelles to come hither as soon as possible, and to wait for me—never mind how late. Let this lad be taken care of," he added, indicating Jacob: "and see that he wants for nothing."

Then, hastening up stairs to his own chamber, he locked himself in, having declined the attendance of his valet.

He tore open the packet which Jacob had given him, and beheld a small leathern case. This case contained a roll of letters and other documents *tied round with a piece of ribbon so faded that it was impossible to determine what its colour might have originally been.* There was also, accompanying this roll, a brief note addressed to himself.

With trembling hand he opened the note, and, with beating heart and tearful eyes, read the following words:—

"I have sent you the papers, my dear brother—for so I shall make bold to call you still,—to convince you that I did not forge an idle tale when we met last. Whatever your motive for abandoning me in my last hours may be, I entertain no ill feeling towards you: on the contrary, I hope that God may prosper you, and give you long life to enjoy that title and fortune which in so short a time will be beyond the possibility of dispute.

"I had promised to leave behind me a written narrative of my chequered and eventful history for your perusal—but need I explain wherefore I have not fulfilled this promise?"

"T.R."

The Earl wept—Oh! he wept plentifully, as he read those lines.

"He thinks that I have abandoned him—and he expressed the most generous wishes for my prosperity!" he cried aloud. "Oh! my God—I must save him—I must save him!"

He waited not to examine the roll of papers: his half-brother intimated that the necessary proofs were *there*—and, though no human eye watched the Earl's motion at that instant, still he would not imply a doubt of Rainford's word by examining the documents.

But he hastened to dress himself in attire suitable to his contemplated visit to the King; and his toilette was completed just as the carriage drove round to the door.

A few moments afterwards he was rolling rapidly along in the vehicular towards Buckingham Palace, the papers carefully secured about his person, and his heart palpitating violently with the cruel suspense of mingled hope and fear.

Alas! he was doomed to another disappointment.

Though it was but little past eleven o'clock, King George the Fourth had already retired to rest,—or rather had been borne away in a senseless state from one of those beastly orgies in which the filthily voluptuary so often indulged.

This much was intimated to the Earl by a nobleman attached to the royal person, and with whom Arthur was well acquainted.

Quitting the palace in disgust combined with despair, Lord Ellingham returned home.

But, no—we were wrong: he did not entirely

despair. One hope of saving Rainford's life—one faint hope remained,—a hope so wild—so extravagant—and involving a chance with such fearful odds against it, that it could only have been conceived by one who was determined to leave no means, however difficult, unadopted, in order to attain a particular end.

On crossing the threshold of his door, Arthur's first inquiry was whether Doctor Lascelles had arrived.

The reply was an affirmative; and the Earl hastened to the apartment to which the physician had been shown.

It is not however necessary to relate the particulars of their interview; inasmuch as the nature of the conversation which passed between them will be developed hereafter

CHAPTER LIII.

THE EXECUTION.

THE fatal Monday morning broke, yellow—heavily—and gloomily; and the light stole—or rather struggled by degrees into the convict's cell.

Shortly before seven o'clock Tom Rain awoke; and casting his eyes rapidly around, they successively fell upon the turnkey who had sat up with him—the still flickering lamp upon the common deal table—the damp stone walls—and the massive bars at the windows.

For an instant a cold shudder convulsed his frame, as the conviction—the appalling truth burst upon him, that the horrors of his dreams were not to cease with the slumber that had given them birth.

But, with knitting brow and compressed lip—like a strong-minded man who endeavours to conceal the pain inflicted on him by a surgical operation of a dreadful nature—he struggled with his emotions; and, when the governor and clergyman entered the dungeon, they found him firm and resolute, though not insolent nor reckless.

The chaplain offered to pray with him; and he consented to join in devotion.

There was profound sincerity—but no affectation, no hypocrisy, no passionate exclamation—in the prayer which Tom Rain uttered extemporaneously.

As the clock chimed half-past seven, he arose from his knees, saying, "I am now prepared to die."

But there was yet another half hour before him.

Scarcely had the clock finished chiming, when the door was opened, and the Earl of Ellingham entered the cell.

Headless of the impression which his conduct might produce upon the prison authorities present, Arthur rushed forward and threw himself into Rainford's arms, exclaiming, "No—I had not wilfully abandoned you, Thomas!"

"Just now I said that I was prepared to die," answered the convict, returning the embrace with congenial warmth; "and now I may even add that I shall die contented!"

"The time is too precious to waste in mere details," returned Arthur; "or I would tell you how I have been kept away from you by force—by a vile outrage. But you do not now believe that I was willingly absent—that I wantonly neglected you?"

"No—no," exclaimed Rainford. "I seek not an explanation—I require none. It is enough that you are here now—at the last hour!"

The Earl then related, in a few hurried words, the vain exertions he had made on the preceding evening on behalf of Rainford, who expressed his lively gratitude.

Arthur next requested the governor to permit him to have a few minutes' private conversation with the prisoner: but this favour could not be granted—and the Earl dared not persist in his demand, as the chaplain hinted that the convict had bidden adieu to the affairs of this life, and had but little time left for devotion.

Thus was it that Arthur and Rainford had no opportunity of speaking together in private,—although the former had something important to communicate, and the latter perceived that such was the fact.

"Arthur," said Tom, approaching close to his half-brother, and speaking in a low solemn tone, "is there any hope?"

"None—on *this side of the scaffold*," returned the Earl, with a significant glance as he dwelt on his words: and, as he spoke, he took the prisoner's hand as if to wring it fervently.

But Rainford felt something in the Earl's palm, and instantly comprehended that it was an object which he was to take unnoticed by the gaol authorities. Then, rapid as the lightning flash, he perceived a double meaning in the words—"on *this side of the scaffold*;" because he knew that Arthur would not use those awful words, "*the scaffold*,"—but would have said "*the tomb*," had he not had some special, profound motive.

And Rainford *did* comprehend the hint—the hope conveyed; and though he thanked his half-brother with a rapid, expressive glance, yet a sickly smile played upon his lip—indicative of the faintness of that hope so created.

At the same instant heavy footsteps were heard approaching the cell; and the chaplain said in a solemn tone, "The hour is almost come!"

Then Arthur once more threw himself into the prisoner's arms, and whispered rapidly in his ear, "Keep the tube in your throat—and you will be saved!"

Rainford murmured an assent; and the brothers embraced with a fervour which astonished those present, to whom their relationship was totally unknown.

Arthur then tore himself from the cell:—not for worlds could he behold that horrible process termed *the toilette*.

He had also another motive for quitting the dungeon before the last moment:—this was to meet the Sheriff of the County in the passage.

And, behold! in the corridor, he encountered that functionary, the javelin-men, and the under-sheriff, behind whom came the executioner and his assistant.

The Earl accosted the Sheriff, with whom he was acquainted, and who was naturally surprised to meet the nobleman there.

Drawing him aside, Arthur said in a hasty tone, "I have a favour—a great favour to ask of you. The convict is well connected, and his friends demand the body to bury it decently. The earnest prayer that I have to offer you on their behalf, is that you will not prolong the feelings of shame and

ignominy which they will experience during the time the corpse remains suspended."

"My lord," replied the Sheriff, "the body shall be cut down at twenty minutes past eight, and delivered over to the unhappy man's friends."

"A thousand thanks!" said the Earl, pressing the Sheriff's hand.

He then hurried away and the procession moved on to the cell.

* * * * *

Immense was the crowd gathered around the gaol to witness the execution of the celebrated highwayman who had been proved on his trial to be none other than the notorious Black Mask who some years previously had performed the most extraordinary deeds of daring and audacity in the county of Hants.

Yes: immense was the crowd;—and not only did the living ocean inundate all the open spaces about the gaol and all the thoroughfares leading thither, —but it seemed to force its off-shooting streams and channels up the very walls of the surrounding dwellings, so densely filled with faces were the open windows—even to the house-tops.

Near the front gate of the gaol stood a black coach and a hearse;—and concealed between the vehicles and the prison wall, were the Earl of Ellingham, Dr. Lascelles, and three of the nobleman's own men-servants, all muffled in black mourning cloaks, and holding white handkerchiefs to their faces so as to hide their features as much as possible.

Lord Ellingham was convulsed with grief. Far—far more than the convict himself did the generous-hearted nobleman suffer on this terrible morning. He was benumbed with cold—his body felt like a dead weight which his legs could scarcely sustain—his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth—a suffocating sensation oppressed him—and he felt as if all the most frightful misfortunes had suddenly combined to fall with crushing burden on his own head!

The clock of St. George's in the Borough began to strike eight—the clock of the prison echoed those iron notes, which sent upon the wing of the air the signal for death.

Suddenly the hum of the multitudes ceased; and an awful silence prevailed.

The Earl and the physician knew by those signs that the convict had just appeared on the roof of the gaol.

But from where they were stationed they could not command a view of the dreadful scene above: and even if they had been differently placed, Lord Ellingham at least would not have raised his eyes towards the fatal tree.

And now, amidst that solemn silence, a voice was heard,—the solemn, deep-toned, monotonous voice of the chaplain, saying, "*I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord. he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*"

The voice ceased: a sudden sensation ran through the crowd like an electric shock;—and the Earl of Ellingham groaned deeply—groaned in the bitterness of his spirit,—for he knew that the drop had just fallen!

"Compose yourself, my dear friend," whispered

the physician: "for now is the time to arm yourself with all your energies!"

"Thanks, doctor—a thousand thanks for reminding me of my duty," said the Earl. "But this is most trying—most horribly trying! I have lived a hundred years of agony in the last few minutes!"

"Hope for the best, my dear Earl," rejoined the physician. "Do you think that he fully understood you—"

"He did—I am convinced of it!" replied Arthur, anxious to argue himself out of all doubts as well as to convince his companion. "He received the silver tube, and I saw him conceal it in his sleeve. But, alas! we had no opportunity to speak alone—though I had so much to say to him—so many explanations to give—such numerous questions to ask—My God! if after all, *this* plan should fail!"

"If that boy Jacob will only follow my instructions to the very letter," answered Lascelles, "I do not despair of success!"

"Oh! he will—he will!" returned the young nobleman, as he glanced towards the hearse. "He is as intelligent as he is attached to my dear brother!"

The railings in front of the gaol kept the crowd at a considerable distance from the mourning vehicles; and thus the observations which passed between the Earl and the physician were not heard by any save themselves.

And now how languidly—how slowly passed the interval of twenty minutes during which the Sheriff had stated that the body must remain suspended.

To the Earl it seemed as if each minute were a year—as if he were living twenty years in those twenty minutes!

And the crowds had broken the silence which had fallen upon them like a spell;—and ribald jests—obscene remarks—terrible execrations—and vile practical jokes now proclaimed how efficacious is the example of public strangulation!

At last the prison-clock chimed the quarter past eight; and more acute—more agonising grew the suspense of the Earl of Ellingham.

A thousand fears assailed him.

Rainford might not have been able to use the silver tube,—or its imagined effect might have failed,—or the knot of the rope might have broken his neck? Again—the Sheriff might forget his promise, and allow the convict to hang an hour according to the usual custom? And even if all these fears were without foundation, the physician might not be able to fulfil his expectations?

Cruel—cruel was the suspense,—appalling were the apprehensions endured by the young nobleman.

He looked at his watch: it was seventeen minutes and a half past eight.

Two minutes and a half more—if the Sheriff had not forgotten his promise!

But, no: he was even better than his word;—for scarcely had Arthur returned the watch to his pocket, when a sudden sensation again pervaded the multitude—and several voices cried, "*They are going to cut him down!*"

Then came a dead silence.

An intense heat ran, like molten lead, through the Earl's veins; and, at the next moment, he turned death-like cold as if plunged into an ice-bath.

If he had hitherto lived years in minutes—he now seemed to exist whole centuries in moments!

All the fears which had previously struck him one by one, now rushed in an aggregate crowd to his soul.

The next two minutes were all of fury and horror—fury in his brain, horror in his heart!

But at last the gate of the gaol opened; and a gruff voice exclaimed, "Now then!"

The Earl's three men-servants hastened to range themselves near the door of the hearse, which one of them opened; and when the gaol-officials appeared, bearing the coffin, these servants advanced a few paces to relieve them of their burthen, and thrust it into the hearse, while Dr. Lascelles diverted the attention of the officials by distributing money amongst them.

This proceeding, which had been pre-arranged by the Earl and the physician with the three servants, was absolutely necessary: *because Jacob Smith was concealed within the hearse!*

The affair having proceeded successfully thus far, the hearse moved away; and the five persons who acted as mourners entered the black coach, which also drove off.

For the sake of appearances it was necessary that the vehicles should move slowly along, until the outskirts of the multitude were entirely passed: and then—when Blackman Street was reached—the hearse and the black coach were driven along at a rate which is adopted by funeral processions only when the obsequies are over.

CHAPTER LIV.

GALVANISM.

By the time St. George's Church was passed, the drivers had whipped their horses into a furious gallop;—and on—on went the mourning vehicles like the wind.

The sleek and pampered black horses panted and foamed; but the coachmen cared not—they were well paid for what they were doing.

Down Union Street rolled the chaise and the hearse—into the Blackfriars Road—up the wide thoroughfare to the river—over the bridge—along Farringdon Street—and through Smithfield to Clerkenwell Green.

In an incredibly short space of time, the two vehicles stopped at the door of a house in Red Lion Street.

Dr. Lascelles was the first to leap from the mourning coach, and, taking a key from his pocket, he opened the door of the house, into which, quickly as active men could move or work, the coffin was borne from the hearse.

Jacob Smith was helped out immediately afterwards, and he followed the Earl, the physician, and the three servants into the house, while the mourning coach and the hearse still waited at the door.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the coffin, *with the lid now screwed down*, was borne back to the hearse;—the three servants returned to the mourning coach, and the funeral procession was set in motion again—but with slow and suitable solemnity.

In another half hour, the coffin, with the name of "THOMAS RAINFORD" upon the plate, was in-

terred in St. Luke's churchyard; and thus ended this ceremony.

But did that coffin really contain the cold corpse of the once gallant highwayman?

No: it had been hastily filled with stones and straw at the house in Red Lion Street.

And the body—

* * * * *

The moment the coffin was borne into the house in Red Lion Street, in the manner already described, Jacob Smith closed the door behind him, and exclaimed in a triumphant tone, as he produced the silver tube from his pocket, "It was in his throat! I took it out—and I rubbed his temples with hartshorn and applied it to his nostrils the whole way from the gaol to this place! Oh! he will be saved—he will be saved!"

The lid of the coffin, which had not been screwed down, was removed; and in the shell lay the highwayman—with eyes closed—and pale as death!

The Earl of Ellingham shuddered convulsively, and uttered a groan of anguish; but Dr. Lascelles gave his instructions with so much presence of mind and yet such rapidity, that the intensity of the nobleman's grief was soon partially absorbed in the excitement of the scene that now followed.

The body was removed as hastily as possible up stairs, and carried into a spacious laboratory, where it was immediately stretched upon the table.

The three servants then retraced their way down stairs, filled the coffin with stones and straw, screwed the lid tight, and departed with it, as already stated, to St. Luke's church-yard.

In the meantime, the physician, the Earl, and Jacob Smith remained in the laboratory; and now was the profound scientific knowledge of Dr. Lascelles about to be applied to the most wonderful of human aims—the *resuscitation of a convict who had been hanged!*

The poles of a powerful galvanic pile were applied to the body, from which the animal heat had not altogether departed when it was taken from the coffin; and the force of the electric fluid almost immediately displayed its wondrous influence.

An universal tremor passed over the frame of Rainford; and ejaculations of ineffable joy burst from the lips of Lord Ellingham and Jacob Smith.

Dr. Lascelles continued to let fall upon the body a full quantum of the electric fluid; and in less than a minute the right arm of the highwayman moved,—moved with a kind of spasmodic quivering: then, in a few seconds, it was suddenly raised with eagerness and impatience, and the hand sought the throat.

With convulsive motion that hand kept grasping the throat as if to tear away something that oppressed it—as if the horrible rope still encircled it.

Then Rainford's chest began to swell and work with the violence of returning respiration—as if a mighty current of air were rushing back to the lungs.

"He breathes! he breathes!" cried Ellingham and Jacob Smith, as it were in one voice.

"He will be saved," said the physician calmly, as he again applied the poles of the battery;—"provided congestion of the brain does not take place—for that is to be dreaded!"

But the nobleman and the poor lad heard not this alternative of sinister and dubious import: they had no ears for anything save those blessed words—"He will be saved!"

And they were literally wild with joy.

Lascalles, without desisting from his occupation of applying the electric fluid, and apparently without noticing the excitement—the delirium of happiness and hope which had seized upon his two companions, began leisurely to explain how it was necessary to adopt means to equalise the reviving circulation; and though he called for hartshorn, he was not heard. At length he stamped his foot violently on the floor, exclaiming, "Will neither of you give me the hartshorn? Do you wish him to die through *your* neglect?"

The Earl instantly checked the exuberance of his joyous emotions, and hastened to obey all the instructions which the physician gave him.

The hartshorn was applied to Rainford's nostrils; and in a few moments his lips began to quiver:—then, on a sudden, as Lascalles let fall upon him a stronger current of the electric fluid, a terrific cry burst from the object of all this intensely concentrated interest!

But never was cry of human agony more welcome to mortal ears than now; for it told those who heard it that life was in him who gave vent to it!

The physician felt the highwayman's pulse: it beat feebly—very feebly—but still it beat!

And now his limbs moved with incessant trembling,—and he waved his right hand backwards and forwards, his breast heaving with repeated sighs, and gasps, and painful moans.

The doctor applied a small mirror to Rainford's mouth and nostrils; and it was instantly covered with a cloud.

He now opened his eyes slowly; they were much blood-shot—but the pupils indicated the reviving fires of vitality.

His breathing rapidly grew more regular; and though he retained his eyes open, yet he seemed unconscious of all that was passing around him, and gazed upwards with the most death-like indifference.

Lord Ellingham cast a glance of frightful apprehension towards the physician; but the countenance of Dr. Lascalles wore an expression of calm and complacent satisfaction—and the Earl was reassured.

Twenty minutes had now passed since the galvanic operation had commenced; and at last Dr. Lascalles said emphatically, "*He is saved!*"

The Earl embraced him as if he were a father who had just manifested some extraordinary proof of paternal love, or who had forgiven some deep offence on the part of a son.

"We must put him to bed immediately," said the physician, with difficulty extricating himself from the nobleman's embrace, and fearing lest he should be compelled to undergo a similarly affectionate process at the hands of Jacob Smith, who was equally enthusiastic in his joy:—"we must put him to bed immediately," repeated Dr. Lascalles; "and fortunately for us, there is a bed-chamber in the house."

The three then carefully lifted Tom Rain into a small room furnished as a bed-chamber, and where they undressed him and deposited him in the bed.

"And now," said Jacob Smith, "we should re-

member that there is one, who will feel as much joy as ourselves——"

"True!" cried the Earl. "But where does she live?"

"I am acquainted with her abode," returned the lad. "If your lordship will allow me——"

"Yes, my good boy," interrupted Arthur. "It is for you to convey these joyous tidings. But perhaps she may have returned home to her father—for, after all that has occurred, and considering Mr. de Medina's affection for his daughter——But all this while we are talking enigmatically in the presence of my excellent friend the doctor, from whom there must be no secrets——"

"Never mind me," said Lascalles laconically, who perfectly well comprehended the nature of their allusions. "I care little for your secrets; and, even if it were otherwise, I am too much occupied with my patient here——"

"Then we will not trouble you with explanations at present," interrupted the Earl. "Jacob, my lad, hasten to the lady of whom we speak—break the happy tidings to her gently—and bring her hither."

"Yes, my lord," answered the lad, delighted at being chosen as the messenger of good tidings in such a case. "Fortunately, Miss de Medina moved from Brandon Street into the heart of the City, by Mr. Rainford's positive directions: and I shall not be long before I come back with her."

The Earl put gold into his hand; but Jacob returned it, declaring that he was not without money; and in another minute the front door of the house closed behind him.

CHAPTER LV.

THE LABORATORY.—ESTHER DE MEDINA.

WHEN Jacob had taken his departure, Dr. Lascalles returned to his laboratory, mixed some liquid ingredients in a glass, and returning to the bed-chamber, poured the medicine down Rainford's throat.

He then felt his pulse, applied his ear to his chest to listen to the pulsation of his heart, and carefully examined his eyes, which were far less blood-shot than when they opened first.

"He is getting on admirably," said the physician "his pulsation is regular, and neither too quick nor too slow—but just as I could wish it. He seems inclined to sleep—yes—he closes his eyes; and he will awake to perfect consciousness.—But do you know, my dear friend, that in order to oblige you, I have incurred an awful risk?" continued the doctor. "The law would not believe me, were I to declare that it was in the interest of science I made these galvanic experiments, and that having succeeded in recalling the man to life, I was not capable of delivering him up to justice."

"Let us hope that there will be no necessity to make such an excuse at all," said the Earl. "You have rendered me an immense service, doctor——"

"Then I am satisfied," interrupted Lascalles; "for, after all you told me last night, I cannot help liking your half-brother here. He is a generous-hearted fellow; and one would risk much to save such a man from death."

"You had frequently mentioned to me your galvanic experiments," said the Earl: "and last night,

when nearly driven to desperation by the absence of the Home Secretary, the reminiscence of all the wonders you had at different times related to me in respect to galvanism, flashed to my mind—and I sent for you as a drowning man clings to a straw."

"In the adjoining room," observed the physician, "I have tried the influence of galvanism upon thousands of animals and on several men. I have paid high prices to obtain the bodies of convicts as soon as they were cut down;—but never until this day did I succeed in restoring the vital spark. Neither would this experiment have been successful, had we not adopted all the precautions I suggested. The tube in the throat to allow respiration—and Jacob Smith in the hearse to remove the suffocating night-cap from Rainford's head, and the tube from his throat, and then to apply the hartshorn to his nostrils and his temples. Step with me again into the laboratory: you have not yet had time to examine its curiosities," added the physician with a smile. "Rainford sleeps," he continued, glancing towards the bed; "and we shall have a little leisure to inspect the laboratory."

They accordingly proceeded into the adjacent room, where Lascelles directed his companion's attention to the various galvanic and electrical apparatus.

"I am also a devoted disciple of Gall and Spurzheim," observed the physician, when he had expatiated upon the discoveries of Galvani.* "Be-

* Mr. Peck, B. A., in his interesting papers on Electricity in *Reynolds's Miscellany*, gives the ensuing particulars:—"The discovery of galvanic electricity was the result of accident. Madame Galvani, the wife of a distinguished Italian philosopher, being recommended by her medical adviser to partake of broth prepared from frogs, several of these little animals were procured, and were placed prior to their being cooked, in the laboratory of her husband. Some of Monsieur Galvani's friends happened to be amusing themselves with an electrical machine, which was standing in the room, and, by chance, one of the frogs was touched with a scalpel. To Madame Galvani's surprise, she observed the limbs of the frogs exhibit a convulsive motion. Upon examining them closely, she perceived that the muscles were affected at the very time when sparks were received from the machine. When her husband returned, she acquainted him with the circumstance. For some time previously M. Galvani had entertained a belief that muscular action was affected by electricity, and had been experimenting for the purpose, if possible, of verifying this hypothesis. Delighted by the discovery, he lost no time in trying a variety of experiments. At first he tested the effect of sparks alone, on dissected frogs, gradually varying the intensity of the spark. In every case, however, even when the electric action was feeble, he noticed that the muscles of the frogs gave evidence of susceptibility to its influence. He next made experiments with atmospheric electricity. The same result ensued as when the electric action had been elicited by artificial means."

In another paper of the same interesting series, the following account is given:—"On the evening of January the 28th, during a somewhat extraordinary display of northern lights, a lady became so highly charged with electricity, as to give out vivid electrical sparks at the end of each finger, to the face of each of the company present. This did not cease with the heavenly phenomenon, but continued for several months, during which time she was constantly charged; and giving off electrical sparks to every conductor she approached; so that she could not touch the stove, nor any metallic utensils, without first giving off an electrical spark, with the consequent twinge. The state most favourable to this phenomenon was an atmosphere of about 80 deg. Fahrenheit, moderate exercise, and social enjoyment. It disappeared in an atmosphere approaching zero, and under the de-

hold that row of plaster of Paris casts of heads," he continued, pointing to a shelf whereon upwards of fifty of the objects mentioned were ranged: "they have afforded me much scope for curious speculation and profound study."

"I observe that you have casts of the heads of several celebrated criminals amongst them," said the Earl: "Arthur Thistlewood—Daniel Hoggart—George Barrington—Henry Fauntleroy—John Thurtell—William Probert—"

"And many others, as you perceive, my dear Earl," interrupted Lascelles. "The prejudice is as yet so strong amongst people, in respect to phrenology and craniology, that it is difficult to obtain the casts of living heads: I am therefore forced to make friends with the turnkeys in gaols and with the relations of criminals who are hung or who die in prison, to get casts. Moreover, the heads of men who have led remarkable lives, or who have suffered for their crimes, afford such interesting subjects for study and comparison—"

bilating effects of fear When seated by the stove, reading, with her feet upon the fender, she gave out sparks, at the rate of three or four each minute; and, under the most favourable circumstances, a spark that could be seen, heard, or felt, passed every second! She could charge others in the same way, when insulated, who could then give sparks to others. To make it satisfactory that her dress did not produce it, it was changed to cotton and woollen, without altering the phenomenon. The lady is about thirty, of sedentary pursuits, and delicate state of health.

We avail ourselves of the digressive facility afforded us by this note to the text, to relate a true history of the resuscitation of a man who had been hanged—a history which is perhaps one of the most extraordinary "romances of real life" upon record. It is as follows.—Ambrose Gwinnett was hanged at Deal for the murder of a man who merely disappeared, and whose body was not found. Circumstantial evidence certainly pointed strongly to Gwinnett as a murderer; but still it was not proved in the first instance that a murder had been really committed. Gwinnett and another man, of the name of Collins, arrived together at an inn in Deal. Gwinnett borrowed Collins's clasp-knife during supper-time, in the presence of the waiter. On the following morning Collins was missing; and Gwinnett had been met on the stairs, in the middle of the night, coming up from the garden. Blood was found in the garden, and in the midst of the blood was the clasp-knife, open. The traces of blood were continued down to the sea-side, and there they ceased. Gwinnett was moreover found to have in his pocket Collins's purse, which the waiter had seen over night in Collins's possession. Gwinnett's defence was that he had received the purse, after the waiter left the room on the preceding evening, in consequence of an arrangement that he (Gwinnett) should be pay-master for them both; that he had gone down stairs in the night, for a certain purpose, to the garden; that his nose had bled dreadfully; that he had used the clasp-knife to raise the latch of the door, and had dropped it in the dark; and that he had walked down to the sea-side close by to wash his face and hands, and stop the bleeding at the nose with the cold salt-water. This tale was not believed; Gwinnett was found guilty of Murder, and hanged on Sandown Common. But a shepherd, passing by the gibbet a few hours after the execution, and while the victim was hanging in chains, perceived signs of life in him, and cut him down. Gwinnett was recovered, and the kind-hearted shepherd sent him abroad. In a distant colony, Gwinnett met Mr. Collins, the very man for whose alleged murder he had been hanged! An explanation immediately ensued. On the night in question, Collins had also gone down stairs to the garden, and had been carried off by a press-gang who passed along the sea-shore at the time. He was conveyed to a boat, and in that transported to the tender-vessel lying in the Downs: the vessel sailed next morning, and Collins had heard nothing of the dilemma of his friend until they met as just described.



"Comparison between the head of the man and the monkey!" said the Earl with a smile.

"Decidedly," exclaimed the physician. "But I will not bore you with my theories and speculations on this subject. You may, however, suppose that I am not a little enthusiastic in the matter, since I have taken the trouble to have human heads prepared and articulated to facilitate my studies."

Thus speaking, he opened the door of a cupboard.

The Earl started back—for four human countenances met his astonished and horrified gaze, and four pairs of human eyes seemed to glare ominously upon him. At the same time his nostrils were assailed with a strong odour of spices.

"You need not be afraid of them!" ejaculated the physician, laughing: "they will not speak to you."

"But how—whence did you obtain——"

"I suppose you think I murdered four men for the sake of their heads?" cried Lascelles, laughing more heartily still. "Why, my dear Earl, you would be surprised, perhaps, to learn that I often pass whole nights in this laboratory, making galvanic experiments, or pursuing my phrenological and craniological re-

searches. But these heads were obtained from the hospitals, and I myself embalmed and prepared, as you now see them."

"I was not aware that you possessed this laboratory," observed the Earl, "until you stated the fact last night."

"Nor would you ever have known it, had it not been for the desire which you expressed that science should exert itself to rescue your half-brother from the grasp of death," answered the physician. "The truth is, I have had this laboratory upwards of seventeen or eighteen years. I was always devoted to science, especially that on which my own profession is based; and the spirit of anatomical inquiry made me anxious to obtain as many *subjects*—or in plain terms, dead bodies—as possible. I was therefore thrown into perpetual intercourse with resurrection-men, who, of course, are not the best of characters. But I was afraid of having corpses brought to my own house in Grafton Street; and I was also desirous to fit up for myself a laboratory in some retired neighbourhood, where I could pursue my studies without the least fear of interruption, on such occasions when the hu-

mour might seize me. I hinted as much to one of the rascals who sold me *subjects*; and he put me in communication with a man of the name of Tidmarsh. After some haggling and hesitation on the part of Tidmarsh—and when he had consulted, or pretended to consult, his principal—he introduced me to this house, and I lured this room at an enormous rental. I did not, however, care about the high rate demanded of me for the use of the place, because it is not only in a most retired neighbourhood, but there is also a private and subterranean means of egress and ingress from another street, which is useful, you know, for one who has to deal with resurrectionists.”

“And are you the only tenant of this house?” inquired the Earl; “for I presume that the bed-chamber in which poor Thomas lies is not your own.”

“No: some old man occasionally visits the house, and now and then sleeps in that room,” returned the physician. “But I have only seen him once or twice and do not even know his name. I have my own key for the front-door, and I am acquainted with the secret of the subterranean passage; but I never hold any communication with Tidmarsh, beyond paying him the rent when it is due;—and when I happen to meet the old man I have alluded to, we merely exchange a word and pass on. He has his rooms in the house, and I have mine; and as he does not interfere with me, I never trouble myself about him nor his concerns.”

“Then, for aught you know, doctor,” said the Earl, “you may occupy an apartment in the house of bad characters?”

“What do I care?” exclaimed Lascelles. “I could not well have such a laboratory as this at my own residence—my servants would talk about these human heads, and those plaster casts, and the galvanic experiments, and I should be looked upon as a sorcerer, or at all events with so much suspicion and aversion as to lose all my practice. And, by the bye, my dear Earl, you should be the very last,” added the doctor, with a smile, “to hint at the possibility of this house being connected with bad characters; for had I not a laboratory in so quiet a street—a street, too, where no questions are ever asked nor observations made—your poor brother might have waited long enough for the chance of resurrection by galvanic means.”

“True, my dear doctor—I was unjust,” said the Earl. “But you will forgive me?”

“Say no more about it, Arthur. Were men of scientific research to be over particular, they might as well abandon their studies at once. The experiments I have made on corpses in this room, could scarcely have been performed at my own residence; and, to tell you very candidly, I believe that the old man who has the other apartments on this floor, is either a miser or a rogue;—but I care nothing about him or his affairs. And now I will mention to you one very extraordinary circumstance. It must have been, as near as I can guess, five weeks ago that I was one night pursuing my galvanic experiments in this room—I had been operating on divers rabbits, frogs, and rats—and, may be, for anything I recollect, a few cats,—when I was compelled to go down stairs for a particular purpose. On my return, as I came back by that door,” he continued, pointing to one at the farther end of the room, “and which leads to the staircase, I was startled—nay, positively astounded at seeing a man standing near this cupboard, and gazing fixedly on the human heads. I confess I was alarmed at the moment, because I had heard voices in the house during the half-hour previously; and I

remember that I rushed back and instinctively barred and bolted the door. But the man turned round before I had time to close the door—and I caught a glimpse of his face. That man—now who do you think he was?”

“It is impossible to guess, doctor,” said the Earl.

“He was your half-brother, who now has in the adjoining room!” added Lascelles.

“Thomas!—here!” cried Arthur, profoundly surprised.

I could not possibly make a mistake, because I had seen him before—no matter how or where—and knew him immediately,” continued the physician. “Well, I must confess that I was uncertain how to act. I did not wish him to recognise me—although perhaps he had already done so; and I could not very well leave the house and return to Grafton-street at once, because I had on a dressing-gown, and had left my coat in this room. I was half-way down the stairs leading to the hall, when I heard some one opening the front door with a key. Knowing that it must be either the old man I have before mentioned, or Tidmarsh, as they alone besides myself had keys of the front door, I waited till the person came in; and it was Tidmarsh. I immediately told him what I had seen.—‘Ah,’ said he, ‘I suspected there was something wrong, and that made me get up, dress, and come round.’—His words astonished me; and I requested an explanation; but he seemed sorry that he had uttered them inadvertently, and gave some evasive reply. He however accompanied me up stairs; we entered the laboratory, and no one was there. We went into the next room—the one where Rainford is now sleeping—and there we found the carpet moved away from the trap-door—”

“The trap-door!” exclaimed the Earl.

“Yes—a trap-door that leads to the subterranean passage which I have mentioned to you,” added Lascelles; “but you must remember that all I have told you about this house is in the strictest confidence. Well, we found the carpet moved away from the trap-door, though the trap itself was closed. Old Tidmarsh instantly fastened the trap with a secret spring which there is to it, and spread the carpet over the floor again.—‘But does he know the means of getting out at the other end?’ I inquired, shocked at the thought of Rainford being immured in the subterranean.—‘Do you think he would venture down there if he were not acquainted with the secrets of the place?’ demanded Tidmarsh. This struck me as being consistent with common sense; and moreover I began to fancy that Tidmarsh and Rainford must be connected together—pardon me, my dear Earl, for saying so: and that suspicion was encouraged in my mind by the singular and mysteriously significant observation that Tidmarsh had dropped when I met him on the stairs. So I felt no farther uneasiness; but took my departure for Grafton Street. Tidmarsh quitted the house with me, and left me at the corner of Turnmill Street close by—as he lives there.”

“Do you know,” said the Earl of Ellingham, who now appeared to be occupied with an idea which had just struck him,—“do you know that all this conversation about subterraneans, and secret passages, and trap-doors, has created a strange suspicion in my mind?”

“Relative to what?” demanded the physician.

“I briefly explained to you last night the cause of my disappearance for four long weeks,” continued the Earl; “I also acquainted you with the manner of my

escape. Now, I am convinced, by the direction I took, in threading those dreadful sewers, that I was a prisoner somewhere in Clerkenwell; and perhaps—who knows—indeed, it is highly probable, that the very subterranean, of which you have spoken, may contain a dungeon——”

“You shall soon satisfy yourself on that head,” interrupted the physician. “I confess that I have never been there more than three or four times—and then only to help old Tidmarsh convey to my laboratory a subject for my galvanic or anatomical experiments, and which the resurrectionists had deposited at his house in Tunmill Street. So you may believe that I know but little of the precise features of the subterranean. But we will visit it at once; and if there be a dungeon or cell there, such as you describe, we shall discover it.”

The physician and the Earl proceeded into the bed-chamber, where Rainford still slept. Lascelles felt his pulse, examined his countenance attentively, and turned with a smile of satisfaction to the young nobleman, to whom he whispered, “He is beyond all danger.”

Arthur pressed the doctor’s hand with fervent gratitude, while tears of happiness trembled upon his long lashes.

The physician then proceeded to raise the trap-door; and, having procured a lamp from his laboratory, led the way down the spiral staircase of stone.

But the huge door at the bottom was bolted on the other side; and thus further investigation was rendered impossible on that occasion.

They accordingly retraced their steps to the bedroom, closed the trap-door, and spread the carpet over it again.

The Earl nevertheless made up his mind to institute further search in those mysterious premises at some future day.

“My dear young friend,” said the physician suddenly, as they stood by the side of the bed, watching the countenance of the sleeper, “I had almost forgotten that when he awakes presently, it will be necessary to administer a little stimulant—either port-wine, or good brandy, if such a thing can be got in this neighbourhood.”

“I will hasten and procure both immediately,” returned the Earl. “Give me the key of the front-door that I may let myself in without troubling you to descend to open it.”

Lascelles handed the key to the nobleman, who immediately sallied forth to purchase the spirits required.

Having procured a pint-bottle of brandy at the most respectable tavern which he perceived in St. John Street, whither he repaired for the purpose, he was retracing his way, when his eyes were suddenly attracted by a lovely female form crossing the street just mentioned, and proceeding in the direction of Northampton Square.

But the lady was not dressed in mourning; and therefore he conceived that he must be mistaken relative to the idea which had struck him.

And yet that symmetry of form, set off rather than concealed by the ample shawl which she wore,—that dignified elegance of gait,—that gracefulness of carriage, were well-known characteristics of Esther de Medina.

The Earl hastened after her, and pronounced that name.

The lady turned—raised her veil—and extended her hand to the nobleman.

Yes—it was Esther;—but how pale—how profoundly mournful her countenance!

“I am rejoiced to meet you,” said the Earl in a rapid and excited tone; “for I have news to communicate which will give you joy! But—come with me—I implore you—I know all—look upon me as a friend—and in my presence you need not blush. Delay not—I beseech you—come with me at once!”

And drawing her arm in his, he hurried her away towards Red Lion Street.

“My lord,” she said, “I am at a loss to understand——”

“Oh! you know not how nearly that which I have to communicate—to give you evidence of—affects your happiness!” interrupted Arthur. “But I must not tell you all in a breath—it would be too much for you to hear—and I am glad—Oh! I am rejoiced that I have thus met you—for I had dispatched a messenger to seek you—and he might have broken the happy tidings too abruptly——”

Esther gazed upon his countenance in astonishment mingled with an expression of surprise and even alarm; but the Earl perceived not the strange impression that his words had produced, as he hurried her along at a rate which in a more refined neighbourhood would have attracted disagreeable attention.

The house in Red Lion Street was reached; and the nobleman opened the door with extraordinary impatience.

For an instant Esther hesitated to follow him; but, confident of the honourable intentions of the Earl, and anxious to relieve herself from the state of wonder and suspense into which his words had thrown her, she entered the gloomy-looking tenement.

He led her up the dirty, decayed staircase into the laboratory, where he begged her to wait for a moment. He then softly opened the door communicating with the bed-chamber, in order to acquaint Dr. Lascelles with her presence there, and in a few hurried words explain the motives which had induced him to bring her thither; for he supposed that all those circumstances which had led him to believe that the Jewess was the mistress of his half-brother, were unknown to the doctor.

But the moment he opened the door, he started—and an ejaculation of the wildest surprise burst from his lips.

For there—standing by the bed, with hands clasped and eyes upraised in thankfulness to heaven—was the living counterpart of Esther de Medina!

Arthur turned hastily round to convince himself that Esther had not passed in before him: but Esther was indeed a few paces behind him—alarmed by the exclamation which had burst from his lips.

The truth flashed like lightning to the Earl’s brain:—Esther de Medina had a sister—so like herself that, when apart, they might well be taken for each other!—yes—that must be the solution of the enigma which had bewildered him so often!

“Miss de Medina!” he said, hastily taking her hand, “I have been labouring under a strange mistake. But you will perhaps understand how it arose, when——”

He led her into the room:—she started back, exclaiming, “Oh! heavens—my oath!”—but in the next moment the sisters—for such indeed they were—rushed into each other’s arms!

CHAPTER LVI.

A HISTORY OF THE PAST.

MR. DE MEDINA was the son of a Spanish merchant, who died, leaving a considerable fortune behind him, and of which this son was the sole inheritor. But, by the villainy of his relations and the corrupt decision of a Spanish judge, Mr. de Medina found himself despoiled of the riches which were rightfully his own; and at the age of two-and-twenty he quitted his native land in disgust, to return to England, where indeed he had been educated, and the language of which country he spoke as fluently as his own.

It is hardly necessary to state that Mr. de Medina was of the Jewish persuasion; and on his arrival in London, he naturally applied to the eminent merchants of his own creed for employment. It is the fashion in this country to decry the Jews—to represent them as invariably sordid, mercenary, avaricious, and griping—indeed, to carry the charges laid against them to such a length, as to associate with their names a spirit of usury amounting to the most flagrant and dishonourable extortion. And these charges have been repeated so often, and echoed seriously by so many persons deemed a respectable authority, that the prejudice against the Jews has become interwoven with the Englishman's creed. But the exceptions have been mistaken for the rule; and—strange as the assertion may sound to many ears—we boldly proclaim that there is not a more honest, intelligent, humane, and hospitable class of persons on the face of the earth than the Jews.

The fact is, when an Englishman is broken down in fortune, and can no longer raise funds by mortgage on his estate, nor by the credit of his name, he flies to the money-lender. Now Jews are essentially a financial nation; and money-broking, in all its details, is their special avocation. The class of Israelite money-lenders is, therefore, numerous; and it is ten to one that the broken-down individual, who requires a loan, addresses himself to a Jew—even if he take the money-lender living nearest to him, or to whom he is first recommended. Well—he transacts his business with this Jew; and as he can give no security beyond his bond or his bill, and his spendthrift habits are notorious, he cannot of course obtain the loan he seeks save on terms proportionate to the risk incurred by the lender. Yet he goes away, and curses the Jew as an usurer; and thus another voice is raised to denounce the entire nation as avaricious and griping. But does this person, however, reflect that had he applied to a Christian money-broker, the terms would have been equally high, seeing that he had no real security to offer, and that his name was already tarnished? Talk of the usury of the Jews—look at the usury practised by Christians! Look at the rapacity of Christian attorneys!—look at the greediness of Christian bill-discounters!—look, in a word, at the money-making spirit of the Christian, and then call the Jew the usurer *par excellence*! It is a detestable calumny—a vile prejudice, as dishonourable to the English character as it is unjust towards a generous-hearted race!

We deem it right to state that these observations are recorded as disinterestedly and as impartially—as honestly and as conscientiously, as any other comments upon prejudices or abuses which have ever appeared in "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON." Not a drop of Jewish blood flows in our veins; but we have the honour to enjoy the friendship of several estimable families of the

Jewish persuasion. We have, therefore, had opportunities of judging of the Israelite character: and the reader must be well aware that the writer who wields his pen *against* a popular prejudice is more likely to be instigated by upright motives than he who labours to maintain it. In following the current of general opinion, one is sure to gain friends: in adventurously undertaking to stem it, he is equally certain to create enemies. But, thank God! this work is addressed to an intelligent and enlightened people—to the industrious classes of the United Kingdom—to those who are the true pillars of England's prosperity, glory, and greatness!

When Mr. de Medina arrived, friendless and almost penniless, on the British soil, he addressed himself to the heads of several eminent commercial firms in the City of London,—firms, the constituents of which were of his own persuasion. The Jews always assist each other to the extent of their means:—do the Christians? Answer, ye cavillers against the persecuted race of Israel! Mr. de Medina, accordingly, found occupation; and so admirably did he conduct himself—so well did he promote the interests of his employers, that by the time he reached the age of thirty, he found himself a partner in the concern whose prosperity his talents and his industry had so much enhanced. He then repaired to Liverpool, to establish a branch-house of trade, and of which he became the sole manager. His partners dying soon afterwards, he effected an arrangement with their heirs, by which he abandoned all share in the London business, and retained the Liverpool house as his own.

His success was now extraordinary; and his dealings were proverbially honourable and fair. He went upon the principle of doing a large business with small gains, and paying good wages to those who were in his employment. Thus, though naturally of a stern and severe disposition, his name was respected and his character admired. At the age of thirty-five—twenty years before the opening of our tale—he married a lady of his own nation—beautiful, accomplished, and rich. Within twelve months their union was blessed with a daughter, on whom the name of Tamar was bestowed; and at the expiration of another year, a second girl was born, and who was called Esther. But in giving birth to the latter, Mrs. de Medina lost her life; and for a considerable time the bereaved husband was inconsolable.

The kindness of his friends and a conviction of the necessity of subduing his grief as much as possible, for the sake of the motherless babes who were left to him, aroused Mr. de Medina from the torpor of profound woe; and he became so passionately attached to his children, that he would fondle them as if he himself were a child. As they grew up, a remarkable resemblance was observed between them; and as Esther was somewhat precocious in a physical point of view, she was as tall when ten years old as her sister. Strangers then took them for twins, although there was really twelve months' difference between their ages. But they actually appeared to be counterparts of each other. Their hair was of precisely the same intensely black and glossy shade: their eyes were of the same dark hue and liquid lustre;—their countenances presented each the same blending of the white and rich carnation beneath the transparent tinge of delicate olive or bistre which marked their origin; their very teeth were of the same shape, and shone, too, between pairs of lips which Nature had made in the same mould, and dyed with the same

vermillion. Twin-roses did the lovely sisters seem,—roses on the same stalk; and by the time Tamar was sixteen and Esther fifteen, the ripe beauty of the former and the somewhat precocious loveliness of the latter, appeared to have attained the same glorious degree of female perfection.

But their minds were not equally similar. Tamar was vain of her personal attractions, while Esther was reserved and bashful: the former was never so happy as when she was the centre of attraction in a ball-room, while the latter preferred the serene tranquillity of home. In their style of dress they were equally different from each other. Tamar delighted in the richest attire, and loved to deck herself with costly jewels; and, well aware that she possessed a splendid bust, she wore her gowns so low as to leave no room for conjecture relative to the charming fullness of her bosom. Esther, on the contrary, selected good, but not showy materials for her dress, and never appeared with a profusion of jewellery. Though of proportions as rich and symmetrical as her sister, yet she rather sought to conceal their swelling contours than display them. Tamar was of warm and impassioned temperament, and her breast was easily excited by fierce desires; but Esther was the embodiment of chaste and pure notions—her soul the abode of maiden innocence!

Mr. de Medina often remonstrated with Tamar upon her love of splendid attire, and her anxiety to shine in the circles of gaiety. But her ways were so winning, that when she threw her arms around his neck, and besought him not to be angry with her, or to allow her to accompany some female friends to a ball or concert to which she had been invited, he invariably yielded to her soft persuasion.

Tamar was a few weeks past the age of sixteen, and Esther had accomplished her fifteenth year, when an incident occurred which was fated to wield a material influence over the career of the elder sister. One night Mr. de Medina, while returning home on horseback from a neighbouring village where he had dined with a friend, was stopped and plundered of his purse and pocket-book. He was by no means a man who was likely to yield without resistance to the audacious demands of a highwayman; but he was unarmed at the time—and by some accident he was unattended by his groom. The robber, who wore a black crape over his countenance, was armed to the teeth, and seemed resolute as well as desperate: Mr. de Medina, therefore, risked not an useless contest with him, but surrendered his property as above mentioned. On his return home, and while conversing on the incident with his daughters, he suddenly recollected that the pocket-book contained a paper of great value and importance to himself, but of no use to any other person. He accordingly inserted advertisements in the local newspapers, offering a reward for the restoration of that document, and promising impunity to the robber, if he would give it up. But for several days these notifications remained unanswered.

A week elapsed, and one morning an individual, dressed in a semi-sporting style, called at the house and inquired for Mr. de Medina. But Mr. de Medina had just left home for the purpose of conducting Esther to the dwelling of some friends who resided in the neighbourhood of Liverpool, and with whom she was to pass a few days. Tamar was, however, at home; and as the servant informed her that “the gentleman said his business was important,” she desired that he might be shown up into the drawing-room. He was

evidently struck by the dazzling beauty of the Jewess who had thus accorded him an audience; and there was something so dashing—so rakish—so off-hand, without vulgarity, in his manner,—a something between the frankness of an open-hearted man and the easy politeness of one who knows the world well,—that Tamar did not treat him with that degree of cold courtesy which seems to say, “Have the kindness to explain your business, and then you may depart.” But she requested him to be seated; and when he made a few observations which led to a connected discourse on the gaiety and “doings” of the Liverpool folks, she suffered herself to be drawn into the conversation without pausing to ask the motive of his visit. Thus nearly half-an-hour passed away: and while Tamar thought to herself that she had never met a more agreeable gentleman in her life—and certainly never one who possessed such a brilliant set of teeth, or who looked so well in tops and cords,—the stranger came to a conclusion equally favourable concerning herself. Indeed, he was quite charmed with the personal attractions and the conversation of the beautiful Jewess; and when he took his leave, she forgot that he had not communicated his business, nor even his name.

When her father returned home in the afternoon, she mentioned to him the visit of the stranger; but added that he only remained a few moments, and would not explain his business to her. Mr. de Medina immediately expressed his belief that the call had some reference to his advertisement concerning the lost paper. But Tamar enthusiastically repelled the suspicion; declaring that, though he had not stayed a minute, yet his manners, appearance, and address, were of too superior a nature to be associated with a dishonourable avocation. Mr. de Medina asked if he had intimated when he should call again; to which question Tamar, fearful that it would appear strange to give a negative reply, answered—“In a few days.” Thus terminated a conversation in which Tamar had been guilty of much duplicity; and which was marked by the first deliberate falsehood which she ever unblushingly told her father.

On the following day the stranger returned; and Mr. de Medina, not having expected him so soon, was not at home to receive him. But Tamar was in the drawing-room, to which he was conducted as on the previous day. It was summer-time, and she was engaged in tying up the drooping heads of some flowers in the large balcony. The stranger begged her not to desist from her occupation; but, on the contrary, offered, in his gay manner of frank politeness, to assist her. She could not refuse his aid—she did not wish to refuse it; and they were soon engaged in a very interesting conversation. He held the stalks of the flowers, too while she tied the thread; and her beautiful hand passed over that of the stranger’s—not without touching it; while her breath, sweeter than the perfume of the flowers themselves, fanned his cheek. Once, when he stooped a little lower, under pretence of examining a particular rose-bud more closely, his hair mingled with hers, and he could see that the rich glow of excitement flooded her countenance—her neck—and even extended to the bosom, of which he was enabled, by her stooping posture, to catch more than partial glimpses.

When next their eyes met, there seemed to be already a tacit kind of intelligence established between them,—an intelligence which appeared to say

she knew he had allowed his hair to mingle with hers on purpose, and that she had not withdrawn her head because the contact pleased her. The interesting conversation was continued; and an hour had passed before either the stranger showed the slightest sign of an intention to take his leave, or Tamar remembered how long they had been alone together. When he did at length take up his hat and his riding-whip, he also picked up a flower which Tamar had accidentally broken off from its stem in the balcony; and placing it in his button-hole without making the slightest allusion to the little incident, he bowed and quitted the room.

He had been gone at least ten minutes ere Tamar again recollected that he had not mentioned his business nor told his name. She had been thinking of the incident of the flower;—yes—and also of the commingling of her raven locks with his fine, manly light hair. When her father returned home on this occasion, she did not mention the fact of the stranger's visit at all. Throughout the remainder of that day she wondered whether he would return on the following one; and she made up her mind, if he did, not to suffer him to depart before she had elicited his business and his name. In the evening she went out to make a few purchases at a shop in a neighbouring street; and she was retracing her way, when two young men, walking arm-in-arm, and smoking cigars,—having withal something most offensively obtrusive in their entire appearance,—stopped short in front of Tamar, literally barred her way, and began to address her in that flippant, coarse style which, without being absolutely obscene, is nevertheless particularly insulting. "Gentlemen—if such you be," said Tamar, in a dignified manner, "I request you to let me pass."—"Well, won't you let us escort you home, wherever it is?" demanded one; "for you're a devilish sweet girl, upon my honour."—Scarcely were these words uttered when the long lash of a riding-whip began to belabour the backs of the two young swells in a fashion that made them almost scream with agony; and Tamar, who instantly stepped aside, recognised in the champion that had thus come to her assistance, the very individual who was uppermost in her thoughts at the moment when she was stopped in the insulting manner described.

The two swells were for an instant so taken by surprise that they dropped each other's arm and their cigars simultaneously, and began to caper about in the most extraordinary manner, the stranger continuing to lash them with so good a will, and yet in such an easy, unexcited manner, that Tamar could scarcely forbear from laughing heartily. But when they perceived that there was only one assailant, they rushed in upon the stranger, and endeavoured to close with him. He did not retreat a single step, but hitting one of them a heavy blow on the wrist with the butt-end of his whip, he sent him off roaring, while with his left hand he caught the other by the collar of the coat and swinging him round—apparently without any extraordinary effort—laid him on his back in the dust. He then offered his arm to Tamar, and led her away as quietly as if nothing had happened, at the same time commencing a discourse upon some totally different topic, as if he would not even give her an opportunity of thanking him for the manner in which he had chastised the insulting youngsters.

But Tamar *did* thank him—and very warmly

too; for this feat was just one of the very nature calculated to improve the hold which the stranger already had upon the heart of the beautiful Jewess. She now looked upon him with admiration; for all women love bravery in a man;—and his bravery was so real—so natural—so totally devoid of impetuous excitement when called into action, and so free from any subsequent desire to elicit flattery,—that she beheld in him a character at once generous and noble. She could have thrown her arms round his neck, and said, "Stranger! whoever you may be, I admire—I love you!" And when he *did* take her hand, as she leant upon his arm, and when he pressed it gently—then let it fall without uttering a word, but fixed his deep blue, laughing, and expressive eyes upon her countenance with a steadiness that meant much though his tongue was silent, a soft—a delicious languor came over her, congenial with the moonlight hour.

He conducted her to within a few doors of her father's house, and then took leave of her, saying, "I shall see you again to-morrow." She entered her dwelling, and retired immediately to her chamber; for her heart was filled with a happiness which she knew that her countenance would betray. When she met her father at supper, she was more composed; and she said not a word to him concerning the occurrence of the evening.

On the following day the stranger called again; and again did he find Tamar alone in the drawing-room. On this occasion she extended to him her hand, which he took and pressed to his lips. The maiden did not withdraw it; and her cheeks—her neck—her bosom were flushed with the thrilling glow of excitement, while her eyes expressed a voluptuous languor. The stranger drew her towards him—their lips met: they embraced tenderly. Then he declared his love for her—and she murmured words in reply which convinced him that he was loved in return. Thus, on the fourth occasion of their meeting, did they pour fourth the secrets of their hearts; and Tamar plighted her affection to one whose name she as yet knew not!

Their happy interview was suddenly disturbed by a loud knock at the street-door; and Tamar exclaimed, "My father!" The stranger implored her to compose herself; and she had succeeded in assuming a collected and tranquil demeanour, when Mr. de Medina entered the room. Her lover was standing at a respectful distance from Tamar, with whom he appeared to be exchanging the mere courteous observations which usually pass between perfect strangers. Mr. de Medina requested him to be seated, and inquired his business. "I have called relative to the advertisements which you inserted in the newspapers," was the reply.—"I thought as much!" ejaculated Mr. de Medina: then, turning towards his daughter, he said, "Tamar, my love, you can leave us."—The maiden dared not disobey the hint thus conveyed; but as she passed behind her father to quit the room, she darted upon her lover a look so full of meaning—so expressive of ardent affection, that it seemed to say, "Be you who and what you may, I shall never cease to adore you!" And he returned that look with a glance more rapid but equally significant of tenderness.

When she had left the room, Mr. de Medina continued by observing, "May I have the pleasure of learning your name?"—"Certainly," was the off-hand answer. "I am called Thomas Rainford."

"And your business with me, sir," added Mr. de Medina, in a cold tone and with suspicious manner, "is relative to the paper of which I was robbed?"—"Precisely so," exclaimed Tom Rain. "A more suitable person than myself could not possibly have called respecting the affair."—"How so, sir?" demanded Mr. de Medina, his manner growing still more suspicious.—"Simply, because it was I who robbed you," was the cool answer; and Tom Rain's merry laugh rang through the room.—"You!" ejaculated Mr. de Medina, starting from his seat. "Then how dare you show your face here?"—"Oh! very easily," replied Rainford, without moving from his chair. "In the first place your advertisements promise impunity to the robber, on condition that he restores the document; in the second place, if you contemplated any treachery, it would only be the worse for you and would not injure me; and thirdly, it struck me that I had better come in person to give you up the paper, because it might have miscarried through the post, or a messenger might have lost it. However, here it is, Mr. de Medina; and had you not advertised for it, I should have restored it to you. I am no rascally extortioner: I never hold men's private papers as a means of drawing money from them. What I do, I do boldly and in true John Bull fashion. A jolly highwayman, Mr. de Medina, is as different from a sneaking pick-pocket or a low swindler, as an attorney in grand practice is different from the paltry pettifogger who hangs about the doors of criminal courts or police-offices. It is not often I boast in this way, Mr. de Medina; but I thought you might as well understand that a principle of honour alone, and neither fear nor hope of reward, has induced me to restore you that document. As for fear, I never knew it; and as for reward, I should not think of taking it, were you to offer any."—Mr. de Medina gazed upon Rainford in astonishment, as much as to say, "You are really a very extraordinary person!" But his lips uttered not what the countenance expressed.

The highwayman rose, bowed with easy politeness to Mr. de Medina, and quitted the room. As he was crossing the landing towards the stairs, the door of an apartment adjoining that where he had just left Mr. de Medina, was cautiously opened, and Tamar thrust a note into his hand. He caught a glimpse of her countenance as he received it; and he saw that she had been weeping. When he reached the street, he tore open the note, and read as follows:—"I have overheard all! But I do not love thee the less, my brave—my gallant Rainford! This evening, I shall have occasion to call at two or three shops in the same street where you rescued me from insult yesterday."—Need we inform our readers that Tom Rain kept the appointment thus given him? or need we say how the lovers subsequently met as often as Tamar could leave the house without exciting suspicion? Yes—they met frequently; and each interview only tended to strengthen the profound attachment which they had formed for each other.

And no wonder that Tom Rain loved his beautiful Tamar; for beautiful—ravishingly beautiful she indeed was! To behold her countenance, was passion—to gaze on her admirable shape, was rapture;—to meet the glances of her fine black eyes was fascination! And, oh! how devotedly she loved Rainford in return! To her he was a hero;

for, although she knew him to be a highwayman, yet well was she aware that he never stooped to a petty meanness, and that his soul was endowed with many noble—many generous qualities. One daring feat which he performed a few weeks after she first became acquainted with him, converted her admiration into a positive enthusiasm; so that the Empress Josephine could not have more ardently worshipped Napoleon than did Tamar her Tom Rain!

Thus it happened:—One night the Liverpool and Manchester coach was stopped on its way to the former town, by a single highwayman, who wore a crape over his face, was well mounted, and equally well armed. Although the coach was crowded with passengers, most of whom were men, yet so terrible was the robber even in his very coolness—so formidable with his easy air of unconcern, that all were paralysed with fear. No resistance was offered him; and he reaped an excellent harvest from the purses of the passengers. One gentleman, who happened to be the Mayor of Liverpool, was so bewildered by terror, that though only asked for his money, he handed to the highwayman both purse and watch. The latter was returned, the robber declaring that he scorned any thing save the current coin of the realm or good Bank-notes. From the female passengers he took nothing; and, perceiving by the moonlight a poor shivering girl of about fifteen seated outside at the back of the coach, he asked her a few questions. The brief and timid replies which she gave were ample enough to render intelligible a tale of suffering and woe; and the highwayman, drawing forth five guineas, said, "Here, my dear, you need not be afraid to accept this trifle. It comes from a pocket into which none of these gentlemen's gold has gone."—And before the poor girl could utter a word in reply, the highwayman put spurs to his horse, and disappeared in a few moments.

But this action on his part did not disarm the male passengers, who had been robbed, of their rage and their rancour. The Mayor was particularly indignant: the entire town of Liverpool had been insulted—grossly insulted in his worshipful person! Such wrath required a vent; and it found an issue by means of advertising the daring robbery. The Mayor announced, in all the local papers and by means of placards, "that any one who should be instrumental in bringing the highwayman before him, would receive the sum of two hundred pounds as a reward." But a week elapsed before these proclamations received any answer. At the expiration of that time the following incident occurred. One evening, the Mayor entertained a select party of friends at a splendid banquet. The cloth had been removed some time—the ladies had retired to the drawing-room—and the gentlemen, about a dozen in number, were passing the wine rapidly round when a servant entered to inform his master that a person wished to speak to him in the hall. The servant's manner was somewhat embarrassed; and, upon being questioned, he said that the stranger seemed to wear a mask, as his face was too hideous to be possibly a human one. The Mayor trembled; and his guests caught the infection of his terror. His worship hazarded an opinion that the visitor was perhaps in some way connected with the highwayman who had robbed the Manchester and Liverpool coach; and he directed the servant to show

the stranger into the study and then run and fetch a constable. But scarcely were these commands issued, when the door opened; and in walked the object of interest and fear. The Mayor and his guests uttered simultaneous ejaculations of terror; for never did mortal man possess so frightful a face; and as it was partially shaded by a huge quantity of hair and a large slouched hat, it was impossible to decide whether it were really a mask or a natural physiognomy. The nose was enormous, and studded with carbuncles and warts: the cheeks were fiery red; and the chin was of dimensions proportionate with the nasal promontory. This terrible being was enveloped in a long cloak; but through the holes cut for the purpose appeared his arms, the hands holding each a tremendous horse-pistol as big as a blunderbuss.

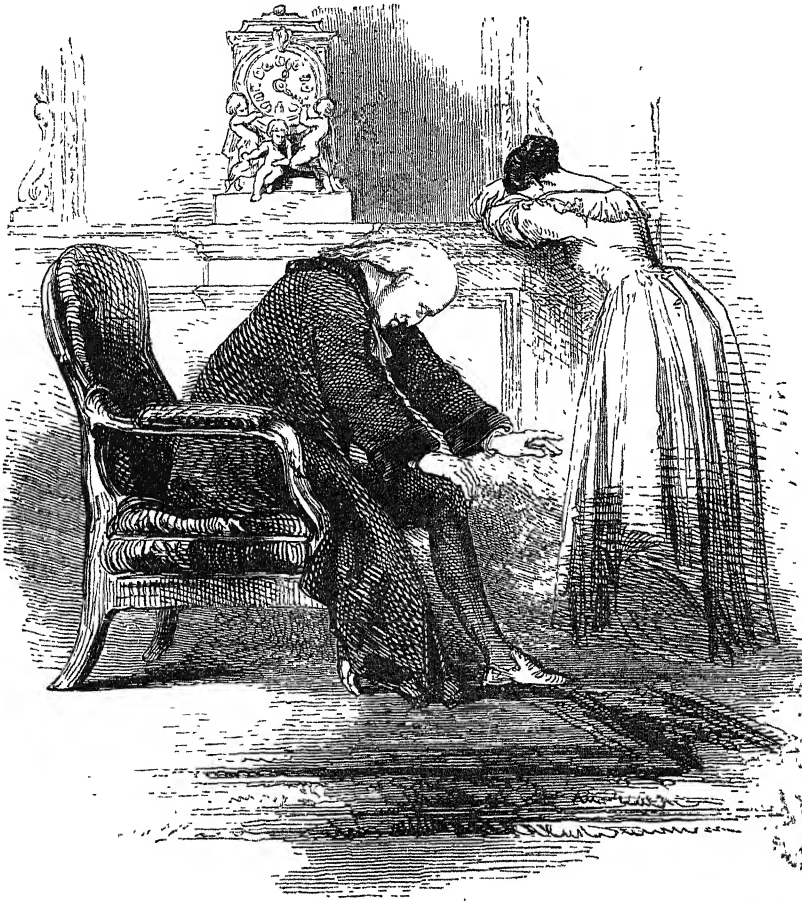
Placing his back against the door, the intruder said, in a voice which he rendered as hollow and fierce as possible, "Most worshipful Mayor! you have advertised that any one who is instrumental in bringing a certain highwayman before you, shall receive the sum of two hundred pounds as a reward. I am the highwayman alluded to: I have brought myself before you; and I appeal to the wisdom and justice of the intelligent gentlemen seated round your board, whether I have not fairly earned the recompense promised?"—"But," stammered the Mayor, "I meant that any one who would bring the robber a prisoner before me, should be entitled to the reward."—"I don't care what you meant," returned the highwayman: "I only know what your advertisements and placards say. You should get the corporation to vote funds to enable you to attach a grammarian to your establishment. He would be more useful than the sword-bearer, I think," added the audacious robber, with a merry laugh in his natural tone. "But I have no leisure to bandy words with you. Tell out the two hundred pounds; or I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of allowing one of these little instruments to empty its contents in the direction of your head."—"And, with these words, he raised a pistol. The Mayor uttered an exclamation of terror, and cast an imploring glance rapidly around. But all his guests were sitting like statues—in blank dismay. The Mayor saw that he must not look to them for assistance; and yet he was very loath to part with two hundred pounds in such an unsatisfactory manner.—"But how do I know that you really are the person who robbed the coach?" he asked, the words evidently costing him a most painful effort to enunciate them.—"Because I can tell you every incident that occurred on the occasion," was the answer.—"That information you may have received from hearsay or gleaned from the papers," returned the Mayor, gathering courage as he found the robber willing to argue the point with him.—"I will give you another proof," said the robber. "There was a bad guinea in the purse I took from you. Are you satisfied now?"—"Not quite," rejoined the Mayor, hoping that by gaining time, some chance might place the daring visitor in his power.—"Then I have one more proof to offer you," said the robber. "In a corner of the purse there was a scrap of paper containing the receipt of an overseer of some parish in Manchester for the quarter's money due for the maintenance of your worship's bastard; and so I suppose you had been to that town to pay it."—The Mayor was aghast at this an-

nouncement burst upon him; for, though he had lost the receipt in question, it had never struck him that he had placed it in his purse when he paid the money at Manchester. The guests surveyed their worshipful host in astonishment; and the servant giggled behind his chair.—"Now are you satisfied?" demanded the highwayman. "Remember, you brought it on yourself."—The Mayor, partially recovering his presence of mind, affected to laugh off the matter as a capital joke on the part of the robber; but he made no farther objection to pay the two hundred pounds. This he was enabled to do, by borrowing all the money that his guests had about them, and adding it to the contents of his own pocket; for the highwayman would neither take a cheque nor allow him to quit the room to procure the requisite sum from his strong-box. The robber would not even leave his post at the door, but compelled the Mayor to rise from the table and bring the cash and notes to him—a proceeding which his worship liked as little as might be, seeing that it brought him into awful vicinity with the nose, the chin, and the pistols. At length the business was settled; and the highwayman withdrew, locking the door behind him,—but not before he had assured the company that if they attempted to open the windows and raise an alarm in the street after him, he would instantly return and put them all to death.

This incident was in every body's mouth next day, throughout the good town of Liverpool and its environs; and the Mayor was most heartily laughed at. But Tamar alone knew the name of the daring individual who had perpetrated so audacious a feat.

The beautiful Jewess carefully concealed her amour from her sister and her father. Indeed, Esther never saw Tom Rain during the whole time that he remained in Liverpool. But one day Tamar disappeared, leaving a note behind her, addressed to her sister, whom she begged to break to their father her flight and its cause. She stated that her happiness—her life were wrapped up in Thomas Rainford: and that as she was well aware her sire would never consent to her union with him, even if the usages of the Jewish nation sanctioned an alliance with a Christian, she had taken a step which she should regret only on account of the distress it might create in the minds of her father and sister. Esther could scarcely believe her eyes when she read the appalling contents of this note. She fancied that she was in a dream: then, when the full conviction of the truth burst upon her, and she comprehended that her sister had really fled with Rainford, she gave way to all the wildness of her grief—for she was deeply, deeply attached to Tamar!

But how did Mr. de Medina bear this cruel blow? He wept not—he gave vent to no passionate exclamation—he manifested no excitement. But, after remaining wrapt up in profound meditation for upwards of an hour, while Esther sat near, watching him with the deepest—most acutely painful suspense,—a long, long hour of utter silence, broken only by the frequent sobs that told the maiden's anguish,—Mr. de Medina spoke in a calm, deliberate, but stern and relentless tone:—"Henceforth, Esther, I have but one daughter—*thyself*! Let the name of Tamar never more be uttered in my presence. Destroy every thing in the house



which may tend to remind me that there once dwelt such a being here—the music whereon her name is written, the drawings which she executed, the very window-hangings which she embroidered. Destroy them all, Esther—keep them not—I command you, as you value my blessing! And henceforth—whatever may occur, never speak of your sister. In the presence of those who are aware that you *had* a sister, cut short any allusion that the thoughtless might make respecting her, by observing emphatically—‘*I have no sister now!*’—for should such allusion be made before me, my reproof and my response would be, ‘*I have but one daughter—and her name is Esther!*’ It is my intention to wind up my affairs as speedily as possible and retire from business. Had not *this* occurred, I should have toiled a few years longer to amass an immense fortune to be divided between *two*: now the fortune which I possess will be immense enough for *one*. And that *one*, Esther, is thyself! But two or three years may elapse before I shall be enabled so to condense the vast details of my undertakings into such a narrow compass that I may terminate them all prosperously. During these *two or three years* we must remain in Liver-

pool: but our sojourn here shall not last a day—no, nor an hour longer than my affairs render imperatively necessary. We will then repair to London; for it is in the great metropolis alone that we may hope to conceal from the world this disgrace—this infamy—this blight which has fallen upon a family whose name, I had fondly hoped, would have gone down untainted from generation to generation—even as it had descended to me from a long line of honourable and honoured ancestors! These, Esther, are my resolves: seek not to move me—I am now inflexible! Nay—implore me not to change my determination, stern though it may appear: it is immutable as those Median and Persian laws whereof mention is made in the Book of Books. *Henceforth I have but one daughter!*”

And having thus announced the inexorable resolves on which his mind had settled itself during that long, long hour of deep and silent meditation, the Jew bent down and kissed the brow of his kneeling daughter with an affection which in its tenderness contrasted strangely with the stern severity of the conduct that he had determined to pursue in respect to the lost—the guilty—the dis-

owned Tamar! He then hurried from the room; and Esther—poor Esther! was left alone to shed torrents of unavailing tears, and give vent to fruitless sobs and sighs.

But, oh! what pen can describe the acuteness of her affliction—the anguish of her gentle heart, when, not daring altogether to disobey the will of her sire, she removed from their frames the charming landscapes which Tamar had painted in water-colours, and placed out of sight the music copies whereon the name of Tamar was penned in her own sweet, fluent handwriting! And blame not Esther, gentle reader—no, blame her not, if, disobedient as to the literal meaning of her father's commands, she retained those paintings and that music,—retained them as memorials of the lost sister whom she so fondly loved! But she secured them in her own chamber; and, alas—poor girl! as she placed the pictures one by one in a drawer, their best tints and their brightest colours were marred by the scalding tears that fell upon them! For, oh! acute as the pain inflicted by the merciless knife which the surgeon wields to amputate a limb, was this task to the sensitive heart of Esther,—a task involving a deed wearing in her eyes the semblance of profanity,—for little short of *that* appeared the removal from their wonted places of those memorials of the disowned and cast-off Tamar. 'T was like crushing all the reminiscences of a sweet sisterhood,—'t was like cutting away from her heart the brightest thoughts that had hitherto clung around it—tearing rudely off the flowers that encircled Hope's youthful brow, and entombing the choice memories of a happy girlhood!

Then, when the music-books and the pictures were thus removed from the places where she had so long been accustomed to see them, how mournful to her was the sight of the tuneful, but now silent piano on which the former had been piled up—how naked appeared the walls to which the latter had hung! And next she was compelled to take down the very hangings which Tamar had embroidered for the drawing-room windows; and there was fresh cause for tears—fresh motive for the renewal, or rather for the continuation of her grief! But the task was nevertheless completed; and the drapery was also retained by Esther as a memorial of her sister. Not for worlds could she have brought herself to that frame of mind which would have been necessary to enable her to achieve the *destruction* of all those objects,—no—not even were her father to menace her with his direst curse! When Mr. de Medina again appeared in the suite of rooms which had been subject to the changes just detailed, he cast a rapid glance around him, and perceiving that his orders had been obeyed so far as *removal* went, asked not a question relative to the manner in which the various objects had been disposed of: but, settling his looks upon Esther's countenance, after that hasty survey, he said emphatically, "*Thank God! I possess an obedient—a dutiful—an affectionate child.*"

In the meantime Tom Rain and the beautiful Tamar were far away from Liverpool, on their road to London; and when they reached the great metropolis, they hired a neat lodging in a secluded neighbourhood—for they entertained apprehensions that Mr. de Medina might endeavour to trace his fugitive daughter. Tamar did not, in this respect, know her father's disposition well. Judging by his

past kindness, she argued accordingly—little imagining that he had strength of mind sufficient to adopt the fearful alternative of casting her off for ever! Rainford had so well stocked himself with coils during his sojourn in Liverpool and its neighbourhood, that there was no immediate necessity of exercising his *professional skill*, or rather *valour*, to supply resources; and several weeks glided away happily—the happiest of his life! He loved Tamar most tenderly and devotedly; and she not only loved him in return—but absolutely adored him. Oh! how she worshipped her gallant highwayman, who was so brave—so generous—and withal so kind to her. Never was there a better temper than that of Tom Rain: it was impossible for him to be put out of humour. He would have scorned the idea of raising a quarrel for the mere sake of making it up again. He saw no amusement in such maudlin proceedings: dissensions, bickerings, and domestic feuds were his abhorrence. He looked upon woman as the weaker vessel, whom man was bound to protect. He thought it beneath him to dispute with a female, because with him it could be a mere warfare of words, to which none but a coward would put an end by means of a blow. Besides, he hated that strife which is waged with the tongue: if a man offended him, he did not wait to argue the point, but quietly knocked him down. That was his first and last reason when irritated: but he could not adopt the same course with a woman, and he therefore most rationally concluded that it was perfectly useless to quarrel with her.

Tamar, like all young and beautiful women—especially being placed as it were in an equivocal position—was jealous. Tom Rain loved to visit all the strange places in which London abounds, that he might make himself acquainted with the "lights and shades" of metropolitan life; and sometimes Tamar complained that he was too long absent. "Now, my dear girl," he would say, "I give you as much of my time as possible; and when I tell you that I shall be home at a certain hour, I never disappoint you. But do not show ill-humour because I take a couple of hours to myself. So now kiss me, and do not teach that pretty face to frown." His good temper invariably proved irresistible; and in the course of time his mistress never thought of manifesting any opposite feeling. Indeed, he was so kind—so good—so attentive towards her, that, had it not been for the frequent intrusion of a painful reminiscence concerning her father and sister, Tamar would have been completely happy.

After remaining for some months in London, Rainford and his beautiful mistress set off for the northern counties, where the highwayman reaped a rich harvest. His midnight expeditions were frequent, because his mode of living was by no means economical: he delighted in good cheer—denied himself nothing that he fancied—and yet was neither a drunkard nor a glutton. He was moreover generous and liberal to an extreme, and, emulative of the character of Robin Hood, gave to the poor no inconsiderable portion of what he took from the rich. Tamar was, moreover, fond of handsome apparel and resplendent jewellery; and Rainford took a delight in gratifying all her whims and fancies. Thus money was lavishly expended by them; but the highway was an inexhaustible treasury to which Rainford never had recourse in vain. The perils he incurred, in these predatory expeditions, were

of course numerous and great; but his dauntless valour—his wonderful presence of mind—and the determined resolution with which he as it were met danger face to face, invariably saved him from capture. At first Tamar was dreadfully frightened when Rainford took leave of her to “get a draught on his treasury cashed,” as he laughingly termed his nocturnal expeditions; but as he invariably returned home about the hour he had promised, those apprehensions wore off, and she at length became comparatively easy in her mind during his absence.

Thus did time pass away, until nearly three years had elapsed since Tamar first met Rainford at Liverpool. During the whole of this period she had heard nothing of her father and sister; and no allusion was ever made to them by her lover or herself when together. But she did not the less devote frequent thoughts to the author of her being and the much-loved Esther, both of whom she longed—oh! ardently longed to embrace once more.

The reader has already learnt the motives which induced Tom Rain to visit the metropolis towards the close of the year 1826. The important information which, during his travels about England in company with Tamar, he gleaned from the gipsy Miranda, led him to betake himself once more to London. It happened that Mr. de Medina and Esther arrived in the capital almost at the same time; for the merchant had not been able to wind up his affairs until that period. Retiring from business with a large fortune, he had resolved to quit Liverpool—a place which constantly brought back the most painful reminiscences to his mind, in spite of his stern resolve to disown his elder daughter for ever. But Esther—had she forgotten Tamar? Oh! no—the memory of the fond sister was immortal; and she would have given whole years of her life to clasp Tamar in her arms again!

This tender aspiration was speedily destined to be gratified. One afternoon, towards the close of October, 1826, Esther de Medina was returning home to Great Ormond Street, after having been to make a few purchases in Holborn, when she encountered her sister Tamar, who was also alone at the time. Fortunately the street where they thus met was in a quiet neighbourhood and at that moment almost deserted: otherwise, the ejaculations of surprise and delight which the sisters uttered, and the eagerness with which they flew into each other's arms, might have drawn upon them an attention by no means agreeable. As it was, they escaped any particular notice; and hastening to the least frequented side of Queen Square, they entered into long and serious conversation together. Tamar implored Esther to tell her how their father had received the tidings of her flight; and the younger sister was so overcome by her emotions, that she allowed the entire truth to be extracted from her by the questioning and cross-questioning of the impatient Tamar. Thus was it that the latter learnt how she had been disowned—cast off for ever! Terrible were the efforts which it cost her to subdue a violent outburst of grief; and her heart seemed as if it would break, when in a low tone she addressed her sister thus:—“Esther dearest, my father has no cause to apprehend that I shall proclaim myself his daughter. No—let him boldly declare that he has but *one* child—*myself*! I know not how long I may remain in London; but

his I faithfully promise you, that I will appear abroad as little as possible, and then only with my countenance concealed by a dark veil, so long as the interests of him whom I love may compel him to dwell in this city. That we shall be long here, I do not believe. Tell our father, Esther, that we have thus met; and communicate to him those assurances that I have now given thee.”—Esther clung to her sister for support: that language was distressing to the young maiden to hear.—“And are you happy, Tamar?” she asked, weeping bitterly.—“As happy as woman can be, whose father has disowned her and who is separated from her sister,” replied Tamar, now weeping also. “Yes, dearest Esther, I am happy with *him* whom I love so well, and who is so kind, so fond towards me!”—“This assurance diminishes my grief,” murmured Esther. “Oh! how glad I am that we have thus met: this interview has suddenly relieved me of a tremendous weight of cruel uncertainty regarding thee! But, alas! Tamar, why did you desert your happy home? why did you abandon a father and a sister who loved you so tenderly?”—“Esther, hast thou not yet known *that love* which is so different from the affection existing even between parents and their children, or between those who are so closely linked in the bonds of kinship as yourself and I?”—“No!”—“Well, then, Esther, I can scarcely make you comprehend how much more deserving of pity than blame I am! He whom I love so well came to the house—I did not seek him; and my heart soon—oh! full soon became his. Could I help it? It were vain and idle to say that we can control those feelings which constitute the passion of Love! No earthly power could have restrained the current of that attachment which hurried me along to the accomplishment of what became my destiny. And when one loves as I loved and still love, Esther,—and as I am loved in return,—father, sister, home, kindred, friends—all are forgotten! Oh! this is true—so true, that you would not, blame me, did you know what it is to love as I love!”—“Blame you, dearest sister!” exclaimed Esther. “Never! never!” And she clasped Tamar fervently in her arms; but it was now dark, and that part of the square to which they had retired for the purpose of unrestrained discourse, echoed to no voices save their own.

When the sisters were a little more composed, Esther informed Tamar of all that had occurred since they had last seen each other,—how their father had renounced the cares and fatigues of business, and had resolved to settle altogether in London; and how he was then negotiating with the Earl of Ellingham for the tenancy of a small but compact estate near Finchley. The sisters then agreed to correspond together; for Esther secretly hoped that her father would not deny her the pleasure of receiving letters from her sister. Tamar was accordingly to address her correspondence to Great Ormond Street; and Esther was to direct her letters to “*T. J., South Moulton Street*,” where Rainford and his mistress were then passing under the name of Jameson. The sisters were now about to part, when, Esther, drawing a diamond ring from her finger placed it in Tamar's hand: then taking a small pair of scissors from her reticule, she cut off the end of one of her own ringlets, which, having folded in a piece of paper, she also presented to her sister, saying in her softest, sweetest tones,—“Tamar

the love which subsists between us, no circumstances can destroy—no length of absence impair. We are about to separate: and, though with the hope of meeting again, still that meeting might be deferred by accidents at present unforeseen. I would that you should possess some memorial of your sister——” “Oh! is it necessary?” exclaimed Tamar, in an impassioned tone of profound sincerity.—“If not necessary, it would be at least soothing to my feelings,” said Esther; “for I possess memorials of you, in your drawings and your music. Grant me, then, the favour which I am about to ask you.”—“Name it, sister,” replied Tamar, now deeply affected in her turn.—“It is, dearest,” continued the amiable Esther, “that you dispose of the ring which I have now presented to you, and that with the proceeds you will have made a locket in which my hair may be set, and on the inner side of which my name may be engraved. Thus I implore you to do, my sister; and I know that you will not refuse me.”—“The next time we meet, Esther,” said Tamar, in a tone tremulous with emotion, “I will show you the locket.”—The sisters then separated with aching hearts.

On her return home, Esther frankly and candidly confessed to her father all that had occurred. For some minutes Mr. de Medina remained silent; and Esther observed that a tear trembled upon his lash. But the hope thereby excited within her, died away, when her father turned abruptly round, and said, “Esther, you have not acted well. That you should speak to her who was once my daughter, is natural. But that you should arrange with her the means of correspondence, was wrong. I desire that the first letter which she may address to this house, shall also be the last.”—The Jew then quitted the room, leaving his daughter in tears.

On the very next day Tamar wrote a long and most affectionate letter to her sister; and Esther was compelled to inform her, in the reply, of the harsh command issued by their father. But that very severity on the part of Mr. de Medina to some extent—at least in this particular instance—destroyed that frank and open-hearted confidence which Esther had hitherto manifested towards him, and which was inherent in her nature. She could not make up her mind to break off all correspondence with her sister; and yet she dared not receive any future letters at the house in Great Ormond Street. The idea of having Tamar’s letters addressed elsewhere, naturally suggested itself, therefore, to her imagination; and she accordingly made an arrangement at the post-office in Southampton Row, by which the woman who kept the shop consented to receive and keep for Esther any missives that might be thus addressed:—“*A. B. C., Post Office, Southampton Row. To be left till called for.*” That same evening Esther wrote another letter to her sister, acquainting her with this arrangement; and we should observe that Tamar duly communicated all these circumstances to Tom Rain, who was delighted to find that she whom he so fondly loved had experienced so much happiness by thus meeting and corresponding with her sister. The highwayman was not, however, a little astonished when he had learnt from Tamar that Mr. de Medina was about to become the tenant of the Earl of Ellingham; and it was then for the first time that he communicated to his mistress the full particulars of all that the gipsy Miranda had told him, and which had made him acquainted with

his parentage,—particulars already so well known to the reader.

The seventh day after these events was the 31st of October—a date rendered memorable, so far as this narrative is concerned, by the affair of the diamonds. It was about five o’clock in the afternoon of the day named, that Tamar called on Mr. Gordon, the diamond-merchant in Arundel Street, to dispose of her ring. Rainford would have transacted the business for her, but he was occupied at the time in effecting his negotiations with Old Death; and, moreover, Tamar considered it to be a matter exclusively regarding herself. We must confess that the idea of possessing the means of procuring a beautiful locket shared in her mind the place that ought to have been entirely occupied by the proofs she had received of her sister’s devoted attachment. But Tamar was passionately enamoured of resplendent jewellery; and when, in Mr. Gordon’s apartments, she beheld a beautiful set of diamonds lying in an open case upon the table, the temptation became irresistible. It cannot be supposed that she had been very nearly three years the companion of a highwayman without having her notions of *mine* and *thine* considerably shaken; and through her brain instantly flashed the thought—“Wherefore should not I make myself the mistress of those charming jewels, as well as Tom render himself the possessor of a purse on the main road?” Scarcely was the idea conceived, when she resolved to execute it; and she haggled with the diamond-merchant relative to the price which he was to pay for the ring, merely to gain an opportunity to self-appropriate the diamonds. That opportunity served; and she departed alike with the produce of the ring and of the theft!

But scarcely had she reached the street, when her sentiments underwent a complete revulsion; and she would have given worlds to be able to recall the last ten minutes. For an instant she paused, hesitating whether she should not return into the presence of Mr. Gordon and restore him the diamonds. Fear, however, prevented her,—a fear lest he might consider her deserving of punishment for having abstracted them at all. She accordingly hurried away towards South Moulton Street. But during her walk thither, she reflected that Rainford might be much annoyed with her for the deed she had committed; and the more she pondered thereon, the more powerful became her conviction that he would be more than annoyed—in fact, deeply incensed. She accordingly made up her mind to conceal the circumstance from him, and seek the earliest possible opportunity of sending back the diamonds, by some safe means, to Mr. Gordon.

On her arrival in South Moulton Street, she found a letter from Esther. It contained assurances of ardent affection, but apologised for its brevity, on the ground that it was then already one o’clock in the day, and that at two Lord Ellingham’s carriage was to be at the door to convey his lordship, her father, and herself to view the mansion and estate near Finchley. She added that they were to dine at the mansion, and were not to return until late in the evening. Tom Rain was present in the room when Tamar read this note; and she communicated its contents to him. Two nights afterwards he departed on a little expedition; and on this occasion Lady Hatfield was robbed by the highwayman near Bedford.

On the ensuing morning Rainford was arrested, and conveyed to Bow Street; but he escaped with impunity, in the manner already described. But how great was his astonishment when he heard the name of Esther de Medina pronounced in the court; and with what interest—with what respectful admiration, did he survey the sister of his Tamar—that sister who loved her whom the father had disowned! When Mr. Gordon was called forward, and stated his name and calling, Rainford began to grow uneasy; for he knew that Tamar had sold him the ring three evenings previously. But as the diamond-merchant gradually explained the details of the robbery of the diamonds, the highwayman's heart sank within him—for he had no difficulty in penetrating the mystery. He was still meditating upon the course that should be adopted to prove Esther's innocence, when it suddenly struck him that she must have been at the estate near Finchley, at the very moment when the theft of the diamonds occurred. The reader knows the rest: Lord Eillingham's attendance at the court was ensured by the intervention of Rainford, and Esther was discharged. Her father, it will be remembered, appeared at the police-office just as the case was about to terminate; and the expression which he made use of to his daughter,—“*Oh! Esther—Esther, I can understand it all! You have brought this upon yourself!*”—is now accounted for. When Esther turned an appealing glance towards her father, as if to remind him of some duty which he ought to perform, or to convey some silent prayer which he could well understand,—it was to beseech him to satisfy the diamond-merchant for the loss of his jewels, and thus save Tamar from any unpleasant consequences which might ensue were the theft traced to her. But, as we have seen, he affected not to notice that rapid but profoundly significant glance.

During the few minutes that Mr. de Medina remained in the court, Rainford was concealed as it were—or at least shrouded from observation—amongst the crowd; and thus he escaped the notice of the Jew. We should also state that it was on this occasion Rainford first beheld his half-brother, the Earl of Eillingham, whose fine blue eyes indicated a frank and generous disposition, and in whose favour the highwayman was immediately prepossessed; for it must be remembered that his eyes were also of a deep blue, and indicated not only good humour, but a certain generosity of disposition. Indeed, it was only in respect to the eyes and the brilliant teeth, that the Earl and Rainford possessed the slightest family resemblance to each other. Yes—it was on this occasion that Rainford first saw him whom he knew to be his half-brother; and the Earl noticed him also,—noticed him amongst the crowd of spectators who thronged the court;—but he knew not then how nearly that good-looking man, with the florid complexion and light hair, was related to him!

When Rainford returned home to South Moulton Street, he upbraided Tamar for the deed which she had perpetrated, and which had involved her sister in such a cruel embarrassment. But he did not reproach her in harsh nor brutal terms: of such conduct he was incapable. He spoke severely and coldly—manifesting his displeasure in a way which touched her to the quick, but provoked no recriminations. She was almost wild with grief when she heard the narrative of her sister being dragged to a

police-office upon so degrading a charge; and, producing the diamonds, she implored Rainford to hasten and send them back to their owner. He intimated his intention of performing that duty in person; and ere he went away, Tamar implored his forgiveness. “I have no right to assume to myself the power of pardon,” he answered; “seeing that my example has done this. But, oh! Tamar—if not for *my* sake—if not for *your* sake—at least for that of your estimable sister who is so devoted to you, abstain from such deeds in future!”—He then embraced her, and issued from the house.

In the meantime Esther de Medina had succeeded in persuading her father to advance the money,—advance to *her* the means wherewith to liquidate the amount of the value at which the jewels were estimated. But in giving the sum required, Mr. de Medina said sternly, “Esther, it is to *you* only that I concede this favour—and not for the sake of her who was once my daughter, and whom the infamy this day brought to light has estranged more remotely than ever from my heart!”—He then retired to another room, as was his wont when he wished to avoid an unpleasant topic: moreover, he thought that his daughter had suffered enough that day to render any further reproach on his part unnecessary—indeed cruel; and he knew that were the subject of conversation persisted in, he should not be able to restrain his ire.

The reader has already seen how Esther de Medina called upon the diamond-merchant, and paid him the sum of six hundred pounds—the amount at which he valued his jewels. He offered her a receipt; but she declined to take it—for she thought that as she was settling the affair from motives purely honourable and through regard towards another, it would appear as if she were really interested personally in the transaction were she to reduce it to a mere matter of business. Not that she meditated a revelation of the fact that she had a sister so like herself that, when seen apart, they might well be taken for each other, and that this sister was the real culprit:—oh! no—she would not, even if she had dared, admit that her father had another daughter! And if she lingered—as if anxious to say something more—’t was merely because her feelings of natural pride prompted her to exclaim, “Oh! sir, believe that I am innocent of this dreadful charge!”—but a second thought convinced her that such a declaration would not be credited, unless supported by a feasible explanation; and she abruptly quitted the house—bearing the stigma, in Mr. Gordon's eyes, of having committed a deed of which she was utterly guiltless!

Scarcely had Esther quitted the diamond-merchant's dwelling, when Tom Rainford called to restore the diamonds; and great was his surprise upon learning that Miss de Medina herself had called and paid the six hundred pounds at which they were valued. He, however, left the diamonds, with the certainty that Esther would hear of their restoration either from Mr. Gordon himself or direct from Tamar. Rainford then returned to South Moulton Street, where he found Tamar in a very excited state. The occurrences of the day had made a profound and most painful impression upon her mind: the indignity offered to her sister—the certain indignation of her father—the upbraidings of Rainford, who had never spoken to her so severely before—and the bitter regrets which she experienced when she contem-

plated her conduct,—all these circumstances had combined to madden her. Thinking that Rainford was absent longer than the business on which he had set out seemed to warrant, she was filled with the most fearful misgivings. At one moment she fancied that, in disgust at her behaviour, he had abandoned her for ever: then she imagined that he must have been arrested as the possessor of the stolen diamonds. Her mind was agitated like the ocean in a storm. She went out in a fit of desperation, and purchased some arsenic at a chemist's shop. She returned;—Rainford had not yet arrived. She sat down, and tried to wrestle with her maddening thoughts: but an invincible idea of suicide dominated them all. She struggled—Oh! she struggled bravely against that terrible sentiment; and at length Rainford came back. He exerted himself to calm her—said all he could to tranquillise her mind. He declared that he forgave her from the bottom of his heart, and lavished every token of tenderness upon her. She endeavoured to triumph over the fearful excitement under which she was labouring; but all she could do was to *appear* calm. Two or three hours passed away, and Rainford hoped she was recovering her equanimity. But a species of delirium suddenly seized upon her: she rushed to the bed-room, and, before Rainford even knew her intention, she swallowed the poison. By the time he had followed her into the room—alarmed at the precipitate speed with which she had hurried thither—the deed was accomplished; and the paper which he picked up, as she threw herself frantically at his feet, explained to him the whole truth.

Not a moment was to be lost. Entrusting Tamar to the care of the servant-girl, Rainford rushed from the house; and, as a hackney-coach was fortunately passing at the moment, he leapt into it, desiring the driver to take him to the nearest physician of eminence. The name of Dr. Lascelles was best known to the honest jarvey, and to Grafton Street did the vehicle accordingly proceed. The physician accompanied Rainford to South Moulton Street, and Tamar was saved. But ere Lascelles took his departure, the highwayman had resolved on adopting some plan to prevent any disagreeable consequences occurring in respect to Esther de Medina on account of this attempted suicide on the part of Tamar. For Rainford naturally reflected, that as the physician was constantly moving in society, and must necessarily have an immense circle of acquaintance, it was more than probable that he might, sooner or later, encounter Esther, whom he would mistake for the sister—his real patient. Hence the solemn promise which Rainford exacted from Lascelles—that *when once his professional visits had ceased in South Moulton Street, he would forget that he had ever beheld Tamar; and that, should he ever meet her, alone or in company, he would not even appear to recognise her—much less attempt to speak to her—unless formally introduced, when he would consider his acquaintance with her to be commenced only from the moment of such introduction.* On the ensuing morning, at seven o'clock, Rainford and Tamar took their departure from South Moulton Street, and repaired to Lock's Fields, where the highwayman had already engaged lodgings previously to the affair of the diamonds, as he was anxious, for many obvious reasons, to dwell in a spot as secluded

and retired as possible. Tamar then wrote a long and pathetic letter to her sister, imploring her forgiveness for the indignity which she had undergone on account of one so worthless as herself; and requesting her to address all future letters to her (until further notice) in this manner:—"T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields."

On the same day that Rainford and Tamar thus removed to the vicinity of the Elephant and Castle Tavern, Mr. Gordon called upon Esther de Medina in Great Ormond Street. Esther was much embarrassed when the diamond-merchant was announced; for she feared that if her father were at home, he would naturally hasten to the drawing-room to learn the object of this call, and a renewal of many painful reflections, as well as of much unpleasant observation, would follow. It was therefore with a feeling of pleasure that Esther found, upon inquiry of the servants, that Mr. de Medina had gone out a few minutes previous to Mr. Gordon's arrival. When the diamond-merchant mentioned the particulars of the visit which he had received from the light-haired gentleman, Esther instantly comprehended that the individual alluded to must be Rainford; for though she had never seen him to her knowledge, yet she had heard a few details relative to his personal appearance, three years previously, at Liverpool. Mr. Gordon acquainted her with the restoration of the diamonds, and her countenance suddenly assumed an expression of joy, because she could not help recognising a certain evidence of good principle, and of kind feeling towards herself, in the fact of such restoration.

Two days afterwards Tamar and Esther again met; and the younger sister breathed the most tender expressions of forgiveness in the ear of her whom, though so guilty, she loved so tenderly. On the following evening they met for the third time; and then Esther used all her powers of persuasion to induce Tamar to accompany her home—to throw herself at the feet of their father, and implore his forgiveness. But Tamar answered in a firm tone, while tears nevertheless streamed down her countenance,—"It is impossible, Esther! Rainford loves me so devotedly, that I should esteem myself the veriest wretch upon the face of the earth to desert him; and on this condition alone could I hope to obtain my father's pardon. No: my destiny is fixed; to him I am linked until death shall separate us! Think not, dearest Esther, that I love thee the less because I cannot, dare not, take a step that would probably unite us again at the blessed domestic hearth, and beneath the sacred roof of our father's dwelling. Oh! God knows how sincerely, how earnestly, I wish that such happiness was in store for me! But it is impossible, Esther,—impossible!" And the sisters parted again, each weeping bitterly. Mr. de Medina had noticed that Esther was absent from home a long time on those two occasions; and he taxed her with having seen Tamar again. She did not deny the charge; but falling at her father's feet, she implored him to leave her that source of consolation. Her grief was so excessive, that Mr. de Medina, who in his heart admired these evidences of sisterly affection, gave no reply on that occasion: a negative trembled upon his tongue—but he dared not utter it. He recognised all that was generous and noble in the disposition of Esther; and he felt proud of her as his

daughter—the *only* daughter whom he considered himself to possess. But, when in the solitude of his study, he reflected maturely upon these interviews which were taking place between the sisters, and which, if not at once checked, would naturally become more frequent, his mind was impressed with an idea that Tamar was utterly and irredeemably profligate—abandoned in character beyond all hope; and he feared lest Esther should be corrupted by her conversation. He therefore resolved, painful as the duty was, to put an end to those meetings, and yet mitigate the severity of this blow by winking, as it were, at the continuation of their epistolary correspondence—but still with the firm intention of crushing that indulgence also at a very early period. He knew that oral communication is far more dangerous than written interchange of thought; the former therefore was to be suspended first. He accordingly chose the anniversary of the day on which Tamar fled with Rainford to administer to Esther a solemn oath, binding her never to see her sister again. And to this vow was the unhappy girl compelled to pledge herself. It was the conversation which passed between the father and daughter on this occasion, that Lord Ellingham overheard—or rather, detached portions of which met his ears, producing such strange misgivings in his mind relative to the purity of Esther de Medina.

When the weeping Esther retired to her chamber, after having taken that oath, it struck her that her father had not prohibited her from *writing* to Tamar: and Esther was too glad to avail herself of this circumstance, to unburthen her grief to her sister through the medium of that epistle which Old Death intercepted and perused, but which he afterwards returned to the letter-box in Holborn. And if the reader will refer to that letter, he will perceive that it was specially addressed to Tamar, although when first glanced at, and while the impression remained, unfavourable to Esther's character, it might have seemed to appeal to Rainford himself.

We have now cleared up all the mysteries relating to the family of Mr. de Medina; and we doubt not our readers will be pleased to find that Esther is indeed a model of purity—innocence—and sisterly affection. Oh! despise not, then, the Jewess—for Christians might be proud to emulate her virtues! And Rainford was a man who readily recognised and appreciated all the excellence of her disposition—all the glorious traits of her character, though he knew her not. But he admired—enthusiastically admired the soul that could cling so devotedly to its love for a sister; and from the first moment that the sisters met in London, he vowed that Esther should never again be compromised by any act or deed on the part of Tamar, if he were able to prevent it. Thus was it that, on the night when Mr. Dykes and his myrmidons invaded the house in Lock's Fields, Tom Rain gave such positive injunctions to Tamar not to visit him in prison, should he be captured; for he feared lest any one acquainted with Esther might meet Tamar under such circumstances, the inevitable result being that the one would be mistaken for the other. But on the day previous to his execution, he yielded to the imploring—beseeching letters which Tamar sent to him by means of Jacob Smith; and consented that she should take a last farewell of him, on condition

that she concealed her face as much as possible with a veil.

When Esther read in the newspapers of Rainford's arrest, she felt deeply—deeply for her poor sister, whom she knew to be so devotedly attached to the highwayman. And, oh! Esther herself had begun to comprehend the feeling of love; for she had not beheld with indifference the handsome—the elegant—and the generous hearted Earl of Ellingham;—and all that Tamar had said relative to the wondrous influence of that passion, would at times recur strangely to her memory. Yes—Esther loved the good young nobleman; but her soul was too pure—her manners so deeply fraught with maidenly reserve, to betray the slightest evidence of her attachment. Nor had she yet so far admitted, even in the secret depths of her own mind, the existence of this inclination towards him, as to ponder upon it seriously, or to invest it with the aspect of reality. She knew that he was attached, and believed him engaged to be married to Lady Hatfield: and she sighed involuntarily—scarcely comprehending wherefore—when she thought thereon. Still she loved him—while she believed, in the innocence of her own heart, that she merely felt interested in him as a friend. Nor did her imagination define the true distinction between the feeling which she actually experienced, and that which she only conceived to animate her,—no, not even when the glowing description of love which her sister had drawn on one occasion of their meeting, presented itself to her mind. But she could yet the more easily understand how it was possible for Tamar to love Rainford so devotedly as she did. Hence the acute anguish that Esther experienced, on account of her sister, when she read the arrest of the highwayman. Mr. de Medina did not of course remain ignorant of the occurrence; but he made not the slightest allusion to it in the presence of Esther. Nor did he put into force his previously contemplated plan of forbidding any future epistolary correspondence between the sisters. He felt deeply for Tamar, in spite of his stern silence respecting her; and he would not deprive her, under the weight of such dire afflictions, of the consolation which he naturally conceived the letters of Esther must prove to her. He even gave Esther, though unasked, a considerable sum of money, casually observing “that she might wish to purchase herself a new piano, or any thing else she might fancy;”—and the young maiden pressed her father's hand, for it struck her that he meant her to be the medium of conveying assistance, in case it should be needed, to Tamar. But Tamar, in reply to the letter which Esther wrote proffering pecuniary aid, gave her the assurance that, though bowed down by the weight of affliction, poverty was not amongst the sources of her deep sorrow.

Day after day did Esther fondly hope that her father would speak to her relative to the now unfriended position of her sister; but Mr. de Medina preserved a profound silence. There were, however, moments when Esther fancied that his countenance looked anxious and care-worn, as if a struggle were taking place in his mind. Still time wore on, and he said nothing respecting Tamar:—he mentioned not her name! But one night, when Esther could not sleep, she thought that she heard a moaning sound in her father's room, which was on the opposite side of the passage communicating with her

own; and, alarmed lest he might have been seized with sudden indisposition, she stole silently from her chamber and listened at his door. He was pacing the room with agitated steps, and speaking aloud in a manner indicative of acute mental anguish. "O Tamar! Tamar—my daughter Tamar! wherefore didst thou ever abandon me? God of my fathers! that such misery—such disgrace—such infamy should have fallen upon my race! And yet—though I have disowned thee—though I have cast thee off for ever—though, obedient to a stern duty, I have interdicted thy meetings with Esther, the darling of my heart,—nevertheless, my heart yearns towards thee, my Tamar! Oh! to reclaim thee—to bring thee back to the paths of virtue—to see thee happy and gay as thou once wast,—Oh! to do all this, I would consent to become the veriest beggar who crawls upon the face of the earth!" There was a long pause; and Mr. de Medina continued to pace his room with steps still more agitated than hitherto—while Esther stood in breathless suspense at the door, not daring to make her father aware that she had overheard him, and yet unable to retrace her steps to her own chamber. "But it may not be!" suddenly exclaimed the Jew, in an impassioned—rending tone; for the triumph which he had achieved over his softer feelings, cost him pangs as acute as if his heart-strings were being torn asunder. "No—it may not be! I have pronounced the fatal words, Tamar—I have disowned thee; and I may not recall the *fiat*! But if that man—who led thee astray—should be cut off by the hand of justice—" and the Jew's voice grew tremulous as in broken sentences he uttered these words—"then thou wilt be alone in the world—friendless—perhaps in want—starving—Oh! my God! my God!"

And Esther knew that her father was overcome with the bitterness of grief. For a moment her hand was raised to knock at the door; but in the next the thought struck her that she would be doing wrong to wound, and even humiliate him, by suffering him to know that she had become aware of the sorrow which he devoured in secret! And it also flashed to her mind that beneath the cold, stern, and severe demeanour which he had maintained ever since the flight of Tamar from the paternal roof,—beneath, also, that unbroken—profound silence which he had maintained towards her in respect to the misfortune that had fallen upon Tamar by the arrest of Rainford,—beneath all this, there agitated within his breast feelings and emotions keenly sensitive, but which were seldom if ever allowed to reflect themselves in the mirror of the countenance. Deeming, therefore, her father's grief too sacred for intrusion—too solemn to be broken in upon, Miss de Medina stole back to her chamber, and moistened a sleepless pillow with her tears. Nevertheless, a gleam of light penetrated the dark clouds of grief which hung upon her mind; for she had ascertained, beyond all possibility of doubt, that Tamar was not entirely unloved by her father—that his heart was not a tomb in which her memory was interred!

For, oh! that heart yearned towards thee, Tamar—lost, fallen though thou wast! and this conviction was an anodyne to the lacerated feelings of thy sister Esther! Time passed on—and still Mr. de Medina remained silent respecting the matter to

which the charming maiden daily and hourly hoped to hear him allude. At length the trial took place—and the gallant highwayman was condemned to death. Oh! had it not been for that terrible oath—an oath from which her sire only could release her—Esther would have flown to console her sister at that season of her bitter grief. But, alas! all she could do was to impart solace by means of letters; and how cold is even the most fervent language of the pen when compared with that which the heart feels it should utter through the medium of the tongue! Tamar replied to those letters; and Esther was astonished to perceive that the afflicted woman wrote with a certain degree of calmness—but she feared that it was indeed the calmness of despair! A second time did Mr. de Medina place in Esther's hands a considerable sum of money, telling her to use it as she thought fit; and the beauteous maiden, while her heart fluttered with hope and anxious expectation, exclaimed in an appealing tone, "Oh my dear father—God grant that I do not misunderstand thy motives! Thou knowest that I have no need for all this gold; and *she* requireth a sire's pardon, but not the aid of his purse."—"I do not—I dare not understand you, Esther," returned Mr. de Medina, with difficulty assuming a cold tone, but with tears starting into his eyes:—and then he hastily quitted the room. Esther saw how deeply he was moved: and hope increased—not diminished—within her gentle breast. Then, when she pondered on all her father had uttered aloud, on that night when she had listened at his chamber door,—and when she reflected on all his proceedings since the day of Rainford's arrest,—she fancied that she could fathom his motives and intentions. "Should my dear—dear sister," she thought within herself, "be left friendless and alone in the world, by the hand of justice striking at the existence of him whom she loves—*then*, and only *then*, will the door of the paternal dwelling be opened, and a father's arms be extended, to receive the exile once more."

At length the fatal morning came—the morning on which Rainford was to suffer, and to which date we have now brought up our history. On the preceding Saturday Tamar had written to Esther to say that the hours of her bitterest—most crushing trials were now at hand; and that if she survived the soul-harrowing anguish then in store for her, it would be only with the hope of yet finding herself restored, sooner or later, to the sweet companionship of her sister, and also for the sake of the little boy whom Rainford's kindness had adopted, and who was so completely dependent upon her. "The moment all shall be over on Monday morning," added Tamar in her letter, "my preparations to leave London will commence. It is my intention—my firm intention to proceed to America, and there remain—burying my woes in a strange land, and devoting myself to the care of this boy—until it may please God to move my father's heart to recall me home! Let me receive a letter from thee, then, my beloved sister, on Monday morning—a letter that may console me by the assurances of thy continued love—if consolation there be for me in this life! Let your much-coveted communication reach me, sweetest Esther, at about ten o'clock on Monday. May God bless you, dearest—dearest Esther!"

Accordingly, on Monday morning, at about half past nine, Esther despatched a letter, by a mes-



senger, to Tamar's lodgings in the City. Need we say that this epistle contained all the tender assurances of love and unvarying affection which the affectionate disposition of the Jewish maiden could suggest, or which were calculated to console where consolation was so difficult? When the messenger, whom she had gone out to hire, had departed with the letter, Esther de Medina felt too restless—too nervous—too unsettled, to return home again immediately. The idea that one whom her sister loved had suffered an ignominious death that morning, and that Tamar was at that very moment crushed down to the earth by the weight of her afflictions,—this idea was more than Esther could contend against. She wandered listlessly about—unmindful whither she was going; and it was in this frame of mind that she suddenly heard her name pronounced. She knew the voice, which somewhat recalled her to herself; for it was the voice of Lord Ellingham, whose absence from home had been made known to her by means of the laconic letter which he had addressed to her father from his dungeon.

The reader knows the rest:—with strange rapidity was she hurried away by the Earl towards Red Lion Street; and in the house to which she was conducted, she found her sister, who had arrived there only a few minutes previously, guided by Jacob Smith.

CHAPTER LVII.

A FATHER.

WHILE the scenes related in the fifty-fifth chapter were taking place at the house in Red Lion Street, Mr. de Medina was pacing in an agitated manner his private apartment at his own residence.

Esther had rightly divined his thoughts and intentions: he had indeed been debating in his own mind, for some time past, whether his duty, as a father and as a man, did not command him to forgive a daughter whom the hand of the Lord had so severely stricken.

The Jew thought of his wife long dead, and murmured to himself—"Were she alive still, she would

be kneeling at my feet, imploring me to pardon the erring Tamar! And does she not now look down upon me from those empyrean heights where her sainted spirit is numbered with the blest? Nay, more; do I not see her image now kneeling before me? Oh! can this be imagination? Yes—it is,—it is,—and yet how like the reality!”

Mr. de Medina was so painfully excited that his fancy for a moment conjured up the semblance of his deceased wife, as she had appeared in the pride of her loveliness, long years before.

But when the evanescent illusion had passed away, he again paced the room, a prey to the most painful indecision and doubt.

He longed to recall Tamar to his favour; and yet he feared to compromise his character for firmness and decision;—so strange and yet so sure it is, that, even in those moments when our best feelings are agitating within us to the purest and holiest ends, a miserable sentiment of worldly vanity intervenes, and if it do not altogether mar good deeds, at least impairs the merit of their excellence, by engendering hesitation, wavering, and delay.

Mr. de Medina's conflicting—battling meditations were suddenly interrupted by a loud knock at the street-door; and a servant shortly after announced to his master that the Earl of Ellingham was waiting in the drawing-room.

The Jew remained in his chamber a few minutes to compose his countenance, and collect his scattered ideas, ere he descended to meet the nobleman.

When he entered the drawing-room, he immediately saw by Arthur's face that it was no visit of mere ceremonious courtesy which was now paid to that house.

“My dear Earl,” said Mr. de Medina, “you have been lost to the world for some weeks; and I must confess that when I received the letter which you did me the honour to address to me nearly a month ago, I entertained fears lest business of an unpleasant nature called you thus abruptly away from England.”

“That letter, my dear sir,” answered the Earl, “was not precisely such an one as I should have written to you had I been free from restraint.”

The nobleman then related, in as few words as possible, the outrage that had been perpetrated upon him—the imprisonment he had endured for four mortal weeks—and the manner in which he had escaped.

Mr. de Medina expressed his indignation and surprise at the treatment which the young nobleman had undergone, and inquired if the motive could be accounted for.

“I am totally at a loss to conjecture who were my enemies, and the cause of their abominable proceedings,” answered the Earl. “But let us waive that subject for the present, my dear sir,” he continued; “as it is my duty to engage your attention with other and more important matters.”

Mr. de Medina pointed to a seat near the fire, and then drew a chair for himself to within a short distance of that taken by the Earl.

“I am about to mention a name to you, my dear Mr. de Medina,” continued the nobleman, “which may perhaps—nay, will certainly sound unpleasantly upon your ears; but you know me too well to imagine for an instant that I should thoughtlessly or wantonly give you pain. I allude to Thomas Rainford.”

The Jew started, and his countenance fell.

“This Thomas Rainford, Mr. de Medina,” resumed Arthur, “has wronged you—wronged you deeply; and not for a moment do I attempt to defend his conduct.”

“But how know you, my lord, that the wretched man, who is now no more, and against whose memory common humanity orders me not to nourish animosity—”

“Mr. de Medina,” interrupted the Earl in a low and solemn tone, as he bent towards the Jew, “Thomas Rainford lives!”

“Lives!” ejaculated Mr. de Medina, in a voice loud with excitement and surprise.

“Hush! speak low—in a whisper—the walls have ears!” said Arthur impatiently. “In the name of heaven! compose yourself—calm your mind, Mr. de Medina—for I have much to communicate to you—and that much of the first importance.”

“Proceed, my lord,” said the Jew coldly: “I am all attention.”

“It is, then, true that Rainford lives—”

“And yet scarce an hour has passed since men were crying the account of his execution for sale in the street—beneath this very window,” observed Mr. de Medina, in an incredulous tone.

“It is as true that he is now alive as that he underwent the ordeal of the terrible rope, even as the pamphlet-venders proclaimed beneath your window,” continued the Earl. “In a word, he has been resuscitated by the wondrous agency of galvanism.”

“Good God! my lord—is this possible?” cried Mr. de Medina: “or do my ears deceive me?”

“Again I implore you to master your feelings,” said the Earl; “for I have another circumstance, almost equally strange, to reveal to you. Thomas Rainford is nearly related to me—”

“To you—to your lordship!” exclaimed Mr. de Medina.

“Yes: the same father was the author of our being—though different mothers bore us. He is my half-brother—and all the proofs thereof are in my possession. Nay, more—and *this* I reveal to you to prove the confidence I place in you—he is my elder brother, legitimately born, and is the rightful Earl of Ellingham!”

Mr. de Medina gazed on the young nobleman in speechless astonishment,—with an amazement, indeed, so profound, that it seemed as if he were suddenly paralysed by the announcement which had just met his ears.

The Earl then rapidly sketched the outline of Rainford's birth; and, without in any way alluding to Lady Hatfield, stated that accident had brought them together, and had led to the revelation of all those wondrous circumstances. Arthur did not however forget to mention the generous conduct of Rainford in refusing to avail himself of papers which would have placed a coronet on his brow and vast estates at his disposal, and also in consigning those papers to the possession of Arthur himself.

Mr. de Medina was perfectly astounded at all he heard; and he listened in silent wonderment—no longer interrupting the narrator with comment or question.

The Earl proceeded to inform him how the whole scheme for the resuscitation of the doomed man had been arranged between himself and Dr. Lascelles, and how it had perfectly succeeded.

"Indeed," added Arthur, "I left my half-brother just awakened from a profound sleep, and, though much enfeebled, still beyond the reach of danger. But spare me the necessity of describing to you the first moments of horror—boundless, appalling horror—which he experienced, when, slowly opening his eyes, he awoke to the recollection of all he had this morning gone through, and to the wildest doubts as to where he was and what had actually become of him! Oh! Mr. de Medina, it was a scene which the memories of those who beheld it, never—never could fail to retain—even though madness were to destroy the discriminating powers of the intellect! But all that is passed—gone by; and my brother lives—conscious, too, of resuscitated existence!"

"My dear Earl," said Mr. de Medina, at length breaking the long silence which had been maintained on his part, "I have read and heard many wildly wonderful narratives in my time,—truths also far stranger than fictions,—genuine occurrences which outvie all the marvels of romance. But never—never, do I firmly believe, has mortal tongue related, nor mortal ear listened to, a history more amazing—more solemnly interesting, than this. Should these facts ever transpire to the world, and be seized upon by the novelist as the basis of a tale, those who may read, having been previously unacquainted with those facts, would exclaim, '*'Tis impossible.'*' Oh! what a work might be written, under the title of THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON! But pardon me for wasting your valuable time with these comments—I say, pardon me—because I perceive that you have more yet to relate."

"I have indeed," said the Earl, trembling for the success of the mission which had taken him to Mr. de Medina's house; "and I am now compelled to touch upon a subject which cannot be otherwise than painful to you—"

"I understand you, my lord," interrupted the Jew: "proceed—for I know that you would not refer to that topic without a well-intentioned motive."

"Such is indeed the case," said the Earl. "But not to use more words than are necessary—as time is precious—I shall at once inform you that I am acquainted with the sad episode in my half-brother's life, which relates to—to—your elder daughter."

"Go on, my lord," said the Jew, mastering his emotions.

"But not until this morning—till within an hour ago," continued the Earl, "was I aware that you possessed two daughters. The moment that Rainford was pronounced to be out of danger, I despatched a faithful messenger to break the tidings to her who loves him, and whom he loves so well; but while this messenger was absent, I had occasion to leave, for a short time, the house where Thomas Rainford now lies; and accident led me to encounter Miss Esther. Pardon me, when I state that a variety of circumstances, which I will some day explain, had for several weeks past induced me to believe that she—whom I now know to be an angel of purity and goodness—was the being so dear to my brother; and, anxious to relieve her mind, as I thought, from the agony of grief into which the supposed fate of Rainford must have plunged her,—anxious also that her presence should greet his eyes upon awaking from the deep sleep that followed the galvanic resuscitation,—I led her—dragged her, with me to the house I ere now spoke of—saying heaven only knows what incoherent things

to her as we sped along, and to which, I remember now, she listened and replied with an amazement since explained. But, in the meantime, Jacob Smith—the messenger whom I had sent to your elder daughter—had arrived with her; and thus—you perceive how innocently on my part,—the sisters were brought together by the bed-side of my brother!"

"Esther and Tamar together!" ejaculated Mr. de Medina, starting from his seat, in mingled anger and surprise: then, suddenly changing to an aspect of profound sorrow, he murmured, "Oh! Esther! thine oath—thine oath!"

"She did not violate it, Mr. de Medina," said the Earl emphatically. "As well might it be asserted that, had you sworn never to enter my house, and were you carried thither by force, your vow would be wilfully—wickedly broken. No:—Miss de Medina knew not whither she was going—knew not whom she was to see—knew not that her sister would be there! If any one has erred in all this, 'tis I; and yet I, Mr. de Medina," added the Earl proudly, "am incapable of doing a bad deed. There lives not the man who, with truth, could impute to me aught that I should be ashamed to have published before all the world. And it is not to boast of untarnished rectitude—of a bright fame—of an unsullied reputation, that I now speak;—but it is to convince you—you, Mr. de Medina, a man of the world—yourself upright beyond all doubt—honourable beyond all possibility of impeachment,—it is to convince you, that if I have incurred your displeasure, I did not the act wantonly—and that I deserve forgiveness."

"Excellent young man!" exclaimed the Jew, grasping the Earl's hand, and wringing it with even paternal warmth: "who shall dare to impute sinister motives to one like you? No,—Oh! no:—were all the scions of the aristocracy as noble-hearted as yourself—endowed with such feelings as you possess, they would be a blessing instead of a curse and a shame to this country. I was unjust," added Mr. de Medina, more slowly,—"unjust towards my beloved and amiable Esther—and unjust also in respect to you. But, oh! my lord," continued the Jew, while tears rolled down his cheeks, "it is hard—it is hard to have the honour of one's name tarnished by a disobedient daughter:—and such is the lost—the unhappy Tamar!"

"The best of us in this world are but poor, erring, sinful mortals in the eyes of Him who is all-perfect but who is likewise all-merciful," said the Earl in a solemn and impressive tone. "Alas! but a few minutes have passed since I proclaimed my rectitude, vain boaster that I was—and lauded your integrity, miserable flatterer that I was! But I then spoke as men speak—as we mortals are accustomed to estimate our characters for honour and probity. Nevertheless, in the sight of heaven, we are sinners—wretched sinners; and our only hopes are in God's illimitable mercy! Then, Mr. de Medina,—as you hope for salvation in another world,—as you expect forgiveness at the hands of the Almighty for those failings wherewith the very best of us are characterised,—I implore—I beseech you, to pardon your daughter Tamar!"

Glorious—almost god-like, was the enthusiasm with which the fine young nobleman urged his strong appeal—the stronger for all the sincerity of the argument which prefaced it.

Mr. de Medina gazed upon him with mingled wonder and admiration: but when the Earl had done speaking, the Jew turned aside and paced the room in a manner betraying the most painful agitation.

"Think not," resumed Arthur, also rising from his seat, "that I am one of those wretched hypocrites, who, in their sickly cant, make use of the holiest names and the most sacred arguments to win a cause in which they are interested only through selfish and worldly motives. No!—I should scorn to reduce myself to such a level—I should hate myself were I capable of such contemptible duplicity. It is not he who prays longest and loudest, that is the most sincere. But I appeal to you by all things sacred—I, the Christian, appeal to you, the Jew—by those doctrines which form the basis of the creed in which we both put faith,—doctrines which teach us the goodness of the Almighty, as manifested towards the Israelites,—by all HE did for your forefathers.—thereby do I appeal to you to receive an erring daughter back to your arms, and assure her of your pardon!"

Still Mr. de Medina replied not—but continued to pace the room.

"Were your daughter Esther—the amiable, the excellent Esther here," continued Lord Ellingham, "she would not perhaps intercede so vainly as I. During the rapid explanations which were now vouchsafed to me by the repentant Tamar herself,—explanations which have shown me how ineffably beyond all human praise is the conduct of the younger towards her elder sister,—I learnt more of the heart of woman than ever I knew before. My ideas—my sentiments, concerning woman and her mission here, have always been of the loftiest kind: but now I am led to recognise something angelic—something heavenly in her disposition. Oh! Mr. de Medina, had I such a sister as Esther, never—never, would I permit a tear to dim the brightness of her eye, if it were in my power to wipe it away!—never—never, would I allow a pang to steal into her gentle breast, if deed or word of mine could avert it. For I declare your younger daughter to be a very angel of excellence and moral worth; and your entire nation should be proud of the name of Esther de Medina!"

"My lord—my dear Earl," faltered the father, approaching the young nobleman, and taking his hand, "if the Jews should be proud of Esther, the Christians may with good cause glory in their Arthur of Ellingham! But if this *must* be—if Tamar should once more receive from me the name of DAUGHTER—how—"

"I understand you, my dear friend," interrupted the nobleman: "you would ask—you would know what course is to be pursued in respect to my half-brother."

The Jew made a hasty sign for his companion to proceed.

"I must confess that this difficulty struck me forcibly ere I came hither just now," continued Arthur. "My half-brother is devotedly attached to your daughter; and Tamar is equally wrapped up in him. To separate them, in my opinion, would be the height of cruelty: for you to forgive your daughter and consent to allow her to dwell in concubinage with Rainford, are things I know to be incompatible. But is there no course open to them? Listen to the plan which I suggested

before I left those who are no doubt so anxiously waiting my return. It is this: To-morrow night, if Dr. Lascelles accord his permission, I shall accompany my half-brother to France, whence he will proceed as soon as possible to the United States of America. For in the hasty explanations which ere now took place between us all, I learnt that he had already expedited thither a considerable sum of money, his intention having been to proceed with Tamar to the New World when his project was suddenly marred by his arrest. While he is away, and in safety, I shall exert myself to obtain his full pardon; for I shall privately represent to the Minister all the circumstances of this most extraordinary case. To-morrow night, then, we proceed to Dover, whence we shall embark for France. 'Tis for you and your daughters to follow us to Paris; and there the hands of Tamar and Thomas Rainford may be united in the chapel of the British Embassy. I am well aware that it will be a Protestant marriage only;—that in your eyes it may be insufficient, so far as it regards the creed of your daughter;—but it is the least of two evils. For, believe me, Tamar and my brother are so devoted to each other that they would never consent to separate;—no—Tamar would not quit him even to receive her father's pardon! Thus they would continue to live in that state which is repugnant to the feelings of society—a state unhalloved by the rites of the Church. But where two hearts are thus closely connected and are wedded to all intents and purposes, by the mere fact of their binding affections,—tell me—tell me, does it matter much at which of God's altars the blessing of heaven shall be invoked? You will pardon your daughter—you will receive her back into your arms,—you will give her to one who loves her most tenderly and who has ever treated her as if she were his wife—and, after the ceremony shall have been performed, albeit a Protestant one, you may say proudly and unblushingly to those who learn that you have another daughter, and who inquire concerning her,—you may say fearlessly, 'She is married!'"

Mr. de Medina walked towards the window for a few moments to conceal his tears.

But he could not conceal them; and with the holy dew trickling down his cheeks, he turned again to the nobleman, saying in a tremulous and broken voice,—“My friend—my dearest friend, I yield!—you have subdued me! It shall all be as you have designed it!”

The Earl pressed Mr. de Medina's hand with fervent warmth—with the ardour of gratitude.

"Come with me at once—delay not a moment!" exclaimed Arthur, his own eyes also dimmed with tears.

And he hurried Mr. de Medina to the hackney-coach, which was waiting at the door.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE RESUSCITATED.

TOUCHING was the scene in the bed-chamber at the house in Red Lion Street,—that scene which the return of the Earl of Ellingham, accompanied by Mr. de Medina, was to render more touching still.

But previously to their arrival, the group was interesting and must be specially noticed.

Rainford was seated in the bed, propped up with the pillows; for he still felt very weak, though all danger had completely passed.

Standing by his side, with one hand locked in his, was Tamar, clad in deep mourning—a mourning now no longer necessary, and which covered a heart beating with ineffable joy.

Dr. Lascelles and Esther de Medina were also standing close by the bed; and Jacob Smith was leaning over the foot-board, surveying Rainford with eyes dimmed by tears, and in a kind of wonderment as if he were scarcely able to convince himself of the miracle the *living evidence* of which was before him.

The hearts of all were too full for connected discourse; for even the doctor himself was more moved by the incidents in which he had that day performed so prominent a part, than ever he had felt before.

At length Tamar turned towards her sister, and said in a low, tremulous tone, "Do you think, dear Esther, that Lord Ellingham will succeed—can you hope it?"

"I have every hope," replied Esther, firmly. "His lordship suggested a plan by which all our father's scruples may be overcome."

"And by which we shall not be separated, save for a few days, Tamar," observed Rainford.

"I would not quit you even for an hour," answered the elder sister, emphatically; "were it not that I was previously assured of being speedily reunited to you."

Rainford pressed her hand tenderly.

"If my friend Arthur does not succeed with Mr. de Medina," said Dr. Lascelles, "I must go myself, and see what I can do. But I confess that I should despair of producing any effect, were Arthur's eloquence to fail."

"Hark!" cried Jacob Smith: "the front door opens!"

The physician hastened to assure himself that no unwelcome step was approaching; and the sisters exchanged looks indicative of the most acute suspense.

"Bravo!" cried the good doctor, returning in a few moments, and clapping his hands together.

But before he had time to give any explanation as to the cause of a joy so unusual in one of his calm and unexcitable disposition, footsteps approached the room.

The eyes of Rainford, the sisters, and Jacob Smith were anxiously cast towards the door.

Lord Ellingham entered first—his countenance radiant with joy. Another moment—and Tamar bounded forward to meet her sire, in whose arms she was immediately received.

"Oh! my dear—dear father!" exclaimed Tamar; "is it possible that you can forgive me—that this happiness is not a dream?"

"Let the past be forgotten, my child!" said Mr. de Medina, pressing her again and again to his breast: for now that she was forgiven, all the long-smothered generosity and tenderness of his heart in respect to her revived with fresh vigour. "And you, Esther, my well-beloved," he added, "come also and share your father's joy that the day of pardon has at length arrived!"

Most affecting was the scene. The physician

pretended to be busily occupied in wiping his eyeglass; but the tears fell fast upon it:—Rainford and Lord Ellingham both wept aloud; and Jacob Smith whimpered like a little child.

At last the party grew somewhat composed; and Mr. de Medina advanced towards the bed.

"Mr. Rainford," he said, extending his hand, which the resuscitated highwayman grasped with grateful warmth, "to you also do I say, '*Let the past be forgotten.*' From the very bottom of my heart do I forgive you; and this forgiveness I the more readily accord, because I learn that your conduct has been uniformly kind and tender towards my daughter,—because you are prepared to make her your wife according to the ritual of your creed,—and also because I have heard from your noble relative—far more noble in nature even than in name—that you have manifested so many proofs of an excellent heart and a generous disposition towards *him*, that it is impossible not to admire your behaviour in this respect. I have now said all that I intend to utter upon these subjects; for if I be stern and severe in my displeasure, I am equally sincere and profound in my forgiveness."

"My dear Earl," whispered Dr. Lascelles, in the most solemn manner possible, and in a tone audible only to himself and the young nobleman, "I did not think of asking you for any reward for all I have this day done to serve you and yours. But I am so charmed with this Jew, who positively shows more good feeling than many Christians whom I know, that I would give any thing to possess a cast of his head. Do you think—"

"Depend upon it, my dear Doctor, I will not forget your wish," said the Earl, smiling: "but you must admit that this is not precisely the time to ask a favour of so delicate a nature."

"True!" observed Lascelles. "And yet the interests of science—"

"Hush!" said Lord Ellingham: "you will be overheard."

As soon as the party were sufficiently composed to deliberate upon the course now to be adopted, considering the position of Rainford, a solemn convocation was held.

The results of the council may be thus summed up:—Dr. Lascelles, feeling convinced that Rainford was totally out of danger, proposed to return without delay to the West End, to visit his patients who would be otherwise astonished and vexed at his absence. Mr. de Medina was to repair home with his two daughters: and while the young ladies made all the necessary arrangements for the trip to France, their father undertook to proceed to Dover, and secure a sailing-vessel to be in readiness by the time that Lord Ellingham and Rainford should reach that port. Mr. de Medina would then return to London to fetch his daughters; and the family would follow the half-brothers as speedily as possible to Paris. On his side, Lord Ellingham expressed his intention of remaining with Rainford until the moment for their departure together should arrive. Jacob Smith was to stay also in the house in Red Lion Street, and to accompany Tom Rain not only to France, but also to America; for the poor lad was devotedly attached to him, and Rainford felt it almost a duty to remove the youth from the scene of his former temptations and miseries.

Dr. Lascelles accordingly quitted the house, first having promised to see Rainford again next day.

Mr. de Medina and his daughters next took their departure, Tamar having taken a tender farewell of him whom she loved, and whom, according to present arrangements, she was not to meet again until they arrived in Paris. As for Esther, ere she turned to quit the room; she gave her hand to Rainford, who respectfully touched it with his lips.

At length the Earl and Jacob were left together with the resuscitated highwayman, who now lost no time in narrating to them the particulars of his visit to that very house a few weeks previously. For when, on awaking from his deep sleep, he was sufficiently recovered to collect his scattered ideas,—and when the first emotions attendant upon his meeting with Tamar had passed,—he had recognised the chamber in which he was lying. But finding himself under the care and protection of Dr. Lascelles, whom he had seen, it will be remembered, in the house on the night of his memorable adventures beneath that roof, he had so far mastered his surprise and momentary alarm, as to maintain a profound silence relative to his recognition of the place.

But now that there was leisure to converse on matters of secondary importance, and that she in whose breast he was fearful of exciting fears for his safety was no longer present, he detailed at full length all the particulars with which the reader is acquainted, not even omitting the impression existing in his mind that Old Death was no more. Then Lord Ellingham learnt how Rainford had happened to visit the laboratory when he was disturbed by the entrance of Lascelles; and he also heard for the first time how his half-brother had recovered his money, with compound interest, and had obtained all the private papers proving the history of his birth and the marriage of the late Earl of Ellingham with Octavia Manners. Jacob, likewise for the first time, learnt that the very house in which he then was, contained the store-rooms of Old Death; and he now also ascertained the cause of that individual's sudden and mysterious disappearance.

Arthur, in his turn, related the entire particulars of the outrage perpetrated upon him—his imprisonment in a dungeon for four long weeks—the reason of his writing the laconic letter which Rainford had received in prison—his escape by means of the sewers—and his suspicion, in consequence of all he had heard that morning from Dr. Lascelles, that the scene of his late incarceration was not altogether unconnected with the mysterious subterranean of that very house.

But conjecture was useless in respect to all these circumstances; and the only point to which any positive decision could be arrived at, was the absolute necessity that existed for defending the house from all intruders so long as Rainford should remain in it.

Jacob Smith went out to purchase refreshments; and Rainford felt himself so well that he was enabled to make a hearty meal.

Hour after hour passed; and at length evening came.

"Arthur," said Tom Rain, breaking a silence during which he had partially dozed, and now aroused by a sudden idea that had struck him,—
"Arthur, I have a strange fancy—a whim, which I much desire you would gratify—"

"Name it, Thomas," returned the nobleman.

"I should like to see the evening paper," continued Tom Rain. "I need scarcely tell you that

never again will the highways of this nor any other country be rendered dangerous by me—never shall this right hand of mine perpetrate a crime. My career as a desperate plunderer terminated this morning—on the roof of the gaol: from the instant of my resuscitation I date a new term of existence—new in a moral as well as in a physical sense. But I *should* like to see what is said of me in my *last moments*."

For an instant the Earl hesitated—but only for an instant; and Jacob Smith was sent to purchase the evening newspaper.

In due time he returned; and Rainford sat up in bed to read the account of his own execution!

"I am glad of that!" he exclaimed, as his eyes ran down the column headed with the awful words—**EXECUTION OF THOMAS RAINFORD**; and his countenance became flushed with excitement, as he read aloud, in a tone that trembled not in the least degree, a few of the sentences which seemed to give him pleasure:—"He underwent the dreadful process of pinioning with extraordinary courage"—"*his footsteps were as firm as if anything save a scaffold were his destination*"—"he ascended the stairs leading to the roof of the prison with steps that faltered not"—"*the same dauntless courage sustained him as he mounted the fatal ladder which conducted him to the drop*"—"nor did he once exhibit signs of fear; no, not even when the executioner descended beneath the platform to draw the bolt that was to launch him into eternity."—"Thus died a man who possessed a courage that would have rendered him distinguished had his destinies cast him in the profession of arms."

"For heaven's sake, no more of this, my dear brother," exclaimed the Earl, painfully excited.

"Burn the paper, Arthur," said Tom Rain, handing it to the nobleman, and then throwing himself back on his pillow. "I have seen enough—and never wish to read that narrative again. But pardon me for having given you pain; and think not it was any frivolous sentiment of vanity that made me desirous to peruse the account, or that excited me as I read it. I merely wished to convince myself that no injustice was done me, Arthur," he added, very seriously; "for, of all things, I abominate a coward; and I confess—it may be a weakness on my part—that I should not like my *last moments* to have been misrepresented. But let us talk no more on this topic—since it gives you pain. And now, by way of changing the conversation, I will tell you some of the plans I have shadowed out in my mind. Perhaps they may never be realized;—I hope they may."

Arthur had set fire to the newspaper by means of a lamp which was burning upon the table; and, having crushed out the expiring flames with his foot, he drew his chair towards the bed, to listen with attention to his half-brother.

Jacob Smith leant over the foot-board, anxious to drink in the words which Rainford was about to utter.

"I have been thinking," resumed this individual, "that my past life requires a great atonement through the medium of my new existence. I am not, however, one of those men who turn saints, and who hope to win the good opinion of the world and the favour of heaven by means of incessant prayer. No—my ideas are quite at variance with such proceedings. I believe that one good *deed* is worth ten thousand *psalms*. It certainly is more beneficial to

our fellow-creatures, and must therefore be more acceptable to the Almighty. I have been thinking, then, how pleasant it would be for one who possesses an independence, to employ his leisure time in seeking out those poor, unhappy beings whom adverse circumstances, or even their own faults, have plunged into misery. If they be cast down through misfortunes unconnected with errors, it would be delightful to aid them: but doubly pleasing must it be to reclaim those who have erred, and to afford even the felon a chance of quitting his evil ways and acquiring an honest livelihood."

"Oh! it would—it would, indeed!" ejaculated Jacob Smith, all the adventures and incidents of his own chequered life rushing to his memory.

"I have been reflecting, moreover—not merely within the last few moments," continued Rainford, "but ever since I heard the narrative of one who became an ill-doer in spite of himself,"—looking significantly for an instant towards the lad,—“but who struggled successfully at last against temptation, cruel attempts at coercion, and almost unheard-of wretchedness,—I have been reflecting, I say, that society is wrong in refraining from the adoption of strenuous means to reform those whom it considers to be the most abandoned. The reformist does not enter the criminal gaol: he considers it to be useless. But whither should he go, if not *there*? He should reason with himself that it is impossible for men willingly to cling to the unnatural—the feverish excitement of a life of incessant crime, if they had any chance of adopting pursuits unattended with constant peril. Setting aside the morality of the case, nine-tenths of those very persons who sing the loudest, swear the hardest, and appear the most depraved, would gladly quit a course that makes their conscience see a constable in every shadow. I think I can give you a parallel case, which will fully illustrate my meaning. It is the custom to vilify the Irish—to declare that they cling with a species of natural tenacity to their rags, their dirt, and their penury—to assert that they themselves are the foes to any civilizing principles which may be applied to them. But look at Irish labourers in England—look at the Irishman when in *this* country, supplied with plenty of work, earning adequate wages, and removed from scenes of political excitement. Does he not work hard? is he indolent? does he adhere lovingly to rags and misery? No such thing! Well, then, it is equally absurd to suppose that criminals cling with affection to crime, prisons, and an existence harassed by constant apprehensions. Remove the thief or the housebreaker from the sphere into which circumstances have cast him, and from which he cannot extricate himself,—give him a chance of earning an honest livelihood, and of redeeming his character,—and in nine cases out of ten, he may be reclaimed. There are, of course, exceptions to all rules; but I am convinced, from all I have seen and heard, that I am now speaking of a rule, and not of the exceptions. Well, then, these considerations lead me back to the starting point which I chose; and I repeat my former words,—that were some man to devote himself to the visitation not only of the dwellings of the honest poor, but also the haunts of crime, and the abodes of vice, the deep sinks of impurity, and even the felons' gaols themselves, he would be able to effect an immense

amount of good. You may be surprised to hear such sentiments come from my lips—"

"I am delighted—ineffably delighted!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham, speaking with the enthusiasm of unfeigned joy; "and I agree with every opinion you have put forth. I see that our laws are miserably deficient, while they seek only to punish and not to reform—that our legislators are short-sighted if not actually wicked, in neglecting to adopt means to prevent crime by reforming the criminal, rather than encourage turpitude by rendering the criminal a desperate outcast."

"Oh! my dear brother," cried Tom Rain joyfully, "how happy I am to hear you thus express your adhesion to those theories which I have so rapidly glanced at. And are not you a legislator of England—an hereditary legislator? and do you owe nothing to your country? Believe me, when I declare that were you to apply your intellect—your talents—your energies, to this great question, you would render your name so illustrious that the latest posterity would mention it with veneration and gratitude!"

"Rest well assured, Thomas, that these words of yours shall not be thrown away upon me," returned Arthur solemnly.

"And, on my side—humble individual that I am, and that I intend ever to remain," added Rainford, with a significant glance towards the Earl, "my resolution is fixed to make some atonement in another part of the world for all the bad deeds I have committed in this. Should I reach America in safety, it will be my task to reduce to practice some of these theories which I have just now broached; and I believe that the results will fulfil all my expectations."*

* Mr. Brandon, in his admirable preface to Mr. Miles's work on *Poverty, Mendicity, and Crime*, places on record the ensuing observations:—

"It is a generally-admitted axiom that among the uneducated, the human mind is more prone to evil than virtue; how greatly, then, must vice be disseminated, and the evil propensities encouraged, by persons of all descriptions, from the hardened murderer to the truant-playing apprentice, mingling and without one admonitory antidote to check them, all unemployed, all uneducated in the proper school of morality. The idlers, tyros in crime, or petty misdemeanants, be they boys or adults, will listen with eager curiosity to the gossiping of the old and hardened offenders, while relating to each other the exploits they had achieved, or when giving instruction how to escape detection in certain situations, which from their own experience they have been led to conceive the best, and to hear them plot fresh depredations to be committed as soon as they shall have finished the term of their captivity, or be set at large upon a verdict of 'not guilty,' what but evil can arise from such a state of congregating? the mind cannot fail to become contaminated in some degree, even in the best disposed among them; whilst others, incited by the picture of pleasure they have described in the event of a successful enterprise, and from the encouragement given to the growing desires by the hardened wretches, enter recklessly into the path of vice as soon as they have turned their backs on the prison door; future accomplices and companions of the 'gaol bird,' who had been their tutor; commencing their career perhaps by a robbery planned whilst in prison. Minds, not over strong nor sufficiently guarded by moral education, are easily led astray, and the very punishment they are enduring as a requital for faults committed, will be used as the rudder by which they are steered to crime, in persuading them that they are aggrieved victims instead of criminals paying the penalty due to offended justice. This is the certain effect of the present system, and to expect any thing like repentance or thorough reform in a criminal, would be ridiculous."

"There is no doubt of it—oh! there is no doubt!" exclaimed Jacob Smith, catching the enthusiasm which now animated him who was *once*—and so lately—a lawless highwayman, but whom circumstances, and the never altogether crushed sentiments of a rightly constituted mind, had suddenly imbued with the hope of atoning for the past by means of the good which he meditated towards his fellow-creatures.

"Poverty is a fertile source of crime," observed Lord Ellingham; "but then it is declared that many are poor only through their own idleness. How are such persons to be reformed? I am prepared to answer the question. Education will teach them the value of industry, and the necessity of rendering themselves independent of parochial relief and eleemosynary assistance. If a child offend, we say, '*He knows no better.*' The uneducated individual is as ignorant of the real principles of right and wrong as the lisping child; and therefore must instruction—not merely religious, but an enlightened species of education—be provided for the millions."

"In a work published some time since, which is generally considered authentic, 'The Autobiography of James Hardy Vaux,' a notorious thief, is the following anecdote, which, as it corroborates and is illustrative of the facts above stated, namely, that vice is taught in prison, is here inserted.—

"He (Vaux) had in a most systematic manner robbed jewellers' shops, and, as he conceived, every one of note had fallen under his lash. He was at length taken up for stealing a gold snuff-box, and committed to Newgate, where he made acquaintance with two brothers, both of the same profession as his own, and committed for a similar offence; they were very communicative to each other, and Vaux discovered that there were some of his favourite shops which had escaped his notice. 'They pointed out,' says the text, 'about half a dozen shops which it appeared I had omitted to visit, arising either from their making no display of their goods, or from their being situated in private streets where I had no idea of finding such trades. Although I had little hopes of acquittal, it was agreed that in the event of my being so fortunate that I should visit these tradesmen I had overlooked, and I promised, in case I was successful, to make them a pecuniary acknowledgment in return for their information.' He was further instructed in what manner to proceed, and what sort of goods to order, and a Mr. Belger, a first-rate jeweller in Piccadilly, was particularly recommended to his notice as a *good flat*. He succeeded in getting acquitted, and in robbing the shops pointed out to his notice, when, like a 'man of honour,' he did not fail to perform his promise to the two brothers—his associates in Newgate. The *good flat* he robbed more than once, and once too often, for Vaux was discovered by him at last, and through his instrumentality convicted."

* Mr. Brandon has these remarks in his Preface, just quoted from:—"Poverty is one of the great causes, and proceeds from both public and private abuse. It is the originator of minor crime, when it arises from want of employment commensurate to earn sufficient to maintain a large and growing family so often to be found in the hovels of the poor; of the greater offences, when it is owing to idleness, and a total dislike to labour, of which there are but too many instances, the individuals never attempting to work more days than will procure food, and of that a scant portion for the family, while for their particular self they make up the deficiency by a quantity of those pernicious spirits so destructive to health, and become besotted the rest of their time, until they are compelled to labour for a supply of provision; at length work fails altogether, either from a slackness in trade, or the party having become too enfeebled or besotted to use proper care and exertion. Then, with poverty staring him in the face, his favourite liquor refused, and he turned out of the same house in which he had squandered so much, when flushed with cash, he becomes half mad, the inflamed state of his mind from drink adding to it, and the wretches he had associated with in his boozing

"It is for you to urge those great and glorious points in the proper place—in the Parliament of England!" said Rainford; "and, I repeat, posterity will honour your name!"

"I am not such a hypocrite as to deny the existence of those charms which a laudable ambition possesses," returned Arthur; "no selfish considerations will, however, influence me in the public course which I am now determined to adopt. But I am forgetting, dear Thomas, that this prolonged discourse on an exciting topic may be prejudicial to you, weak and enfeebled as you are. Let us not, therefore, pursue the theme at present: it is now growing late—and you stand in need of repose. Jacob and myself will watch by your bed-side."

Rainford pressed his brother's hand, and composed himself to woo the advance of slumber.

In about ten minutes he was fast asleep!

The Earl of Ellingham was seated close by the head of the bed: Jacob drew a stool near the foot, and the two observed a profound silence.

The Earl looked at his watch: it was half-past ten o'clock.

The lamp burnt upon the table.

Suddenly, slow and heavy steps were heard *de-nearth*—as if some one were ascending the flight of stairs under the floor.

Lord Ellingham placed his finger upon his lips to enjoin Jacob to maintain the strictest silence, and then instantly extinguished the light.

In another moment some one was heard preparing to raise the trap-door—a proceeding which Arthur did not attempt to thwart. He knew that if the person or persons now approaching were debarred the ingress which was sought, the front door would be the alternative next essayed; and he therefore resolved that, come what might, he would endeavour to capture and secure any intruders whose presence threatened in any way to interfere with his plans.

These calculations were all weighed in a single moment by the energetic and brave young nobleman.

The trap-door was raised slowly—the carpet was thrust aside from the aperture by the arm of him

hours, being of the worst description, giving bad advice, he is tempted and falls.—But there are others who struggle in vain, and can only get a partial employ at most; who find, strive to their utmost, they cannot gain sufficient to drive 'the gaunt wolf, famine' from the door, and are doomed to behold the wife and children of their love, dearer to them than life, in a state of starvation—what wonder that they should be induced to steal food to soften the cravings of hunger, and alleviate the bitter cries of the young and helpless infants? Parental affection is strong, and what for himself a man would scorn to do, for the sake of his poor and suffering child he rushes to, and rather than behold his family dying in the agony of starvation, he begins by robbing victuals; for this he is placed in prison with a set of reckless vagabonds, by whom he is taught to become as degraded as themselves, and crime following crime, he stops not till he rises to the acme of his profession. Whereas, if this description of prisoners had been kept apart, he would have returned to society nothing the worse for his incarceration.—Early marriages are one of the great causes of poverty, a folly to which the labouring classes are greatly addicted, getting large families before they are enabled by their strength or abilities to maintain them. Dr. Granville made a very curious table showing the ages at which they marry and as his calculation is made upon his *Lying-in Hospital Practice*, which is confined to the lower classes, none else taking the benefit of such institutions, it is confirmatory of the fact, and of the extent of this evil."



who was ascending; and a light suddenly gleamed from beneath.

The intruder carried a lamp in his hand.

Arthur and Jacob Smith maintained the most death-like silence—the former nerved for the trying scene, the latter ready to sink with apprehension on account of Rainford, who still slept soundly.

Having removed the carpet from the aperture,—a task which occupied nearly a minute, as the intruder held the lamp in his left hand and was compelled to support the trap-door in a half-open position with his head or back, while he worked with the right hand,—the individual—for Lord Ellingham was by this time pretty well satisfied that only one person was approaching—prepared to ascend into the room.

But the moment he had removed the carpet, and advanced another step or two upwards, the lamp was dashed from his hand, and he was violently seized by the collar, in the powerful grasp of Lord Ellingham, who exclaimed at the same instant, "Be silent—or you are a dead man!"

The individual thus captured, uttered a low growl, but said nothing.

Then, quick as thought, and with a degree of strength which astonished even him who exercised it, the Earl dragged the man up the steps into the room, but fortunately without awaking the soundly-sleeping Rainford.

All this took place amidst the most profound darkness, be it remembered; but, acting with wonderful energy and presence of mind, Arthur dragged the man along the floor of the bed-chamber into the laboratory; and then, without relaxing his hold, he exclaimed, "Jacob, light the lamp and bring it hither!"

"Jacob!" muttered the prostrate intruder, "Jacob!"

"Silence!" cried the Earl. "You are in the grasp of a desperate man," he added in a menacing tone; "but if you mean no harm, you will receive no injury."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when Jacob Smith, having hastily relighted the lamp, entered the laboratory, closing the door behind him—for he fully comprehended the Earl's motive in dragging the man, whoever he might be, away in the dark from the chamber where Rainford was lying.

But hardly had the light of the lamp fallen upon the countenance of the individual who was now half-lying—half-sitting on the floor, restrained by the vigorous grasp of Lord Ellingham, who bent over him,—when Jacob uttered a cry of mingled horror and alarm, exclaiming, as he staggered back, “*‘Tis Old Death!’*”

The lamp fell from his hand, and was instantly extinguished.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE JEW’S FAMILY.

In the meantime Mr. de Medina had passed a happy afternoon in company with his two daughters and little Charley Watts.

Tamar acquainted her father and sister with the generous conduct of Rainford towards the boy, who was accordingly fetched by a servant from the lodging which he and his adopted mother had recently occupied in the City.

Tom Rain’s kindness in respect to Charley made a deep impression upon Mr. de Medina, who had already heard and seen enough to convince him that the seducer of his daughter possessed many good qualities; especially a generosity of disposition which might have made the envy of a monarch.

Charley had been fortunately retained in complete ignorance of the real cause of the protracted absence of him whom he called by the endearing name of “father.” He was too young to entertain suspicions or misgivings on the subject; and the excuses which Tamar had constantly made to account for that absence, had so far satisfied his mind, that he entirely believed them, although he pined for the return of Rainford. When he beheld Tamar weep, which was often—very often—he exerted himself to console her, throwing his little arms round her neck, and yet weeping also! Even when Tamar, with the bitterest anguish, arrayed herself in deep black on the awful morning the results of which she could not have possibly anticipated, she had not the heart to exchange Charley’s coloured garments for the mourning ones which had been prepared for him. No—she threw them aside: she had not strength sufficient to place before her own eyes an evidence of the dreadful loss which she deemed herself that hour to sustain!

The dinner-table at Mr. de Medina’s house that day, was gayer—oh! far more gay than usual; for a forgiven daughter sate at the board—and Charley Watts was so happy to see his “dear mamma” smile once more, and to receive the positive assurance that he would meet his “papa” in a few days, that it was delightful to behold his sweet countenance animated with such heart-felt, innocent joy.

The attendance of the servants was dispensed with, in order that the conversation might flow unreservedly; and Mr. de Medina felt the full amount of that pleasure which consists in pardoning, as Tamar experienced the ineffable happiness of being by a father pardoned.

And, Esther—beauteous, amiable, generous-hearted Esther,—oh! she was as gay and smiling as she was ever wont to be in her girlhood, ere Tamar’s disgrace had carried sorrow into the heart of the family!

In the evening Mr. de Medina bade adieu to his

daughters and little Charley, and departed in a post-chaise for Dover, according to the arrangements already made.

That night, when the sisters retired to rest, a touching scene occurred in Esther’s chamber; for this amiable girl led Tamar to her drawers, in which she showed her all the music-books and the pictures that had been so religiously preserved.

Then Tamar threw herself, weeping with gratitude and joy, into Esther’s arms; and delicious was the embrace of purest affection in which the sisters clasped each other.

“Oh! how can I ever repay thee for so much love, dearest Esther?” murmured Tamar in a tone expressive of her unfeigned sincerity.

“By thinking of me frequently when you are far away,” replied Esther, the tears streaming from her eyes as she reflected that they were no sooner re-united than they were about to separate again—for a long, long period—perhaps for ever!

“I shall never cease to think of thee, my Esther,” answered the elder sister, as she now began to set at liberty the shining masses of her rich black hair, preparatory to retiring to rest; for she was to share Esther’s bed, little Charley being already asleep in an adjoining chamber, the door of communication being left open in case he might awake:—“no, never shall I cease to think of thee, Esther!” repeated Tamar; “for thou hast always manifested so much devoted affection towards me—and then, too,” she added, casting down her blushing countenance, “thou hast endured so much for my sake!”

“Oh! have we not agreed that the past is to be forgotten?” hastily exclaimed Esther, for a moment desisting from the occupation of laying aside her garments. “The deeds that are gone should only engage our thoughts when no hope survives for the future. And how much hope is there yet for you!” she added, with an emphasis upon the pronoun.

Tamar started, and gazed steadfastly upon her sister’s countenance; for, apart from that emphasis which was not unnoticed, there seemed something mournful in the sweet, liquid tones of Esther’s voice.

“Hope for me!” exclaimed Tamar. “Yes—there is hope of happiness for me and for him whom I love so tenderly! But you spoke, my beloved sister, as if there were hope for me *alone*—and that there was none for you. Ah! Esther, have no secret from me—for I will never henceforth refuse you my fullest confidence, in the letters which I shall address to you so often—so very often! Esther, my sweet sister—you love!”

The maiden buried her countenance in Tamar’s bosom.

“I am not deceived!” continued the latter. “Yes—you love, Esther; and perhaps you are not loved in return? But tell me all, and I may counsel you.”

Esther murmured a name; and, as she thus whisperingly pronounced it, her face was burning in its contact with Tamar’s bosom—so deeply did she blush in the confusion and shame of that confession of virgin love.

“The Earl of Ellingham!” cried Tamar, echoing the name which her sister had breathed.

“Alas!—yes,” answered Esther, raising her beauteous countenance, still suffused with the rich carnation hues of modesty; “I can conceal the truth

from my own heart no longer! But he loves another——"

"Whom he can never marry," added Tamar; "and therefore, my beloved sister, there is hope for thee!"

"Can never marry Lady Hatfield!" exclaimed Esther, in a tone of profound surprise.

"Rainford assured me that such is the case," continued Tamar. "I am not aware of the reason, because he did not volunteer an explanation; and it never has been my habit to question him respecting affairs on which he has not spoken freely of his own accord. But this much I can assure you—that Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham will never be united, and that they no longer entertain even the idea of such union. Do not, therefore, perplex yourself relative to the cause of their severance, my darling Esther; but nourish hope—for, oh! it is delicious to feed love upon the manna of hope! And, believe me, the Earl of Ellingham already surveys you with so much admiration—already entertains so exalted an opinion of your character—already looks upon you with such respect, that he cannot fail to experience feelings more tender still!"

"O Tamar! talk not thus—I may not listen to thee!" exclaimed Esther, with fluttering heart and swelling bosom; for, model of purity and innocence as she was, the words of her sister excited pleasurable sensations within her breast.

And thus ever is it, with the most chaste, most virtuous, and most unsophisticated maiden, who loves for the first time!

"Nay—do not compel me to keep silence on a topic which is—which *must* be dear to your soul, my Esther," said Tamar. "Were human beings to feel shame at loving, there would not be an unblushing cheek in the whole world, save amongst children. Sooner or later, dear sister, every one must feel the influence of that passion, which spares no one. Oh! cold and cheerless, indeed, would this world be, were not the hearts of those who have grown up, and who have cast aside the frivolities of childhood, warmed and irradiated by the beams of Love! Feel not ashamed, then, dearest Esther, on account of this passion which has so imperceptibly stolen upon thee."

"But, after all you have said, Tamar," returned the coy and bashful maiden, "I shall not be able to meet the Earl again without blushing! And then—were I mad enough to indulge in such a hope as you would have me nourish—remember the difference of our creeds!"

"Was it not the Earl himself who suggested the means by which matrimonial rites could be celebrated between his own half-brother and myself?" demanded Tamar eagerly.

"Yes," replied Esther, every feature of her fine aquiline countenance deriving additional charms from the crimson hues which mantled on that splendid face, and spread themselves over her arching neck, her gracefully sloping shoulders, and the rich contours of her virgin bust, which, in the presence of her sister, no invidious drapery now concealed:—"yes, Tamar," she replied; "but there are other—oh! and far more important considerations. Consider how exalted is the rank of that great nobleman—and consider, also," she added, in a mournful tone, "how much our race is still despised even in this land, which boasts of an almost consummate civilisation!"

"The Earl of Ellingham, I feel convinced, despises such absurd—such pitiful prejudices," said Tamar, labouring only to render her sister happy by means of joyous hope. "As an enlightened man, he must recognise how deeply his country is indebted, in respect to its wondrous prosperity, to the commercial enterprise and the financial skill of our nation. Moreover, do we not believe in the same God? For the Almighty whom the Christians worship, is the same who brought our forefathers out of Egypt, and gave them the promised land. In a word, my beloved Esther, Arthur of Ellingham is too noble-minded a being to despise you because you cling to the creed in which you were brought up; and something tells me that my sister is destined to become the Countess of Ellingham."

Esther sighed, but made no response.

Tamar continued to discourse in the same inconsiderate strain for several minutes. She was actuated by the most generous motives towards her sister; but, in the enthusiasm of her affection and gratitude, she forgot that she might only be exciting hopes destined never to receive a fulfilment, and encouraging a passion which, after all, was perhaps doomed to experience the bitterness of disappointment.

At length Esther turned towards her, and exclaimed hastily, "Tamar—if you love me, speak on this topic no more. It may be false shame on my part,—but it seems to me that it is unmaidenly thus to discourse on a subject in which one, who is separated from me by so wide a gulf, is concerned. Alas! deeply do I regret that, in a moment of weakness, I admitted aloud that which my heart had not hitherto dared to whisper even to itself! I should have exercised more command over myself. Oh! I have been foolish—very foolish to permit such a thought even to assume the faintest shape in my imagination. But we will abandon the topic;—and again I say, Tamar—if you love me, renew it not!"

There was a minute's pause, at the expiration of which Esther began to converse gaily and rapidly on Tamar's future prospects in the clime to which it was contemplated that herself and Rainford were to proceed; and the amiable girl communicated to her sister all that she had read concerning the United States of North America.

This little manœuvre on the part of Esther was to change the topic of discourse; and Tamar did not attempt to renew a subject which offended the maiden pride of her sister.

Oh! happy was Tamar to sleep beneath her father's roof that night—to know, to feel that she was in the parental dwelling again! When she awoke once, while it was yet dark, she fancied that she had been dreaming—so strange did all the incidents of the preceding day appear to be—so truly incredible! But, as she stretched out her arms, they encountered the form of her sister; and then—in the silence and obscurity of the night—Tamar joined her hands and prayed fervently,—far, far more fervently than she had prayed for some years past!

And, Christian! darest thou believe that the prayers of the despised Jewess were not waited with thine own to the throne of the Eternal?

CHAPTER LX.

SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT'S DOMESTIC HEARTH.

It was the morning following the incidents just related; and the scene changes to the house of Sir Christopher Blunt, in Jermyn Street.

The worthy knight and his lady were seated at breakfast.

The table literally groaned beneath the weight of the cold viands placed upon it; for the ex-lady's maid was particularly addicted to good things, and she moreover thought that it was "quite the rage" to see cold fowls, ham, tongue, Peigord pie, and all kinds of marmalades spread for the morning repast.

Lady Blunt was in her glory of premeditated negligence and studied *deshabille*. She was arrayed in a pea-green silk wrapper, trimmed all down the front with scarlet bows; and the cape was braided with the same glazing hue, so much affected by a certain Lady of Babylon. Her cap was decorated with ribands likewise of scarlet, and she wore red slippers. Her appearance was indeed most flaming, as she lolled, in delightful lassitude, in a capacious easy chair, with her feet upon an ottoman.

A stranger would have thought that so fine a lady could not possibly touch any thing more substantial than a thin slice of toast or half a muffin for her breakfast; but she had in reality paid her respects—and with a good will also—to every dish upon the table.

Sir Christopher was seated opposite to her, looking like a fish out of water; for, in order to please his dear wife—or rather, to have a little peace and quiet in the house—he had consented to adorn his person with a light blue dressing-gown, fastened by a gold cord and huge tassels at the waist, and a pair of bright red trowsers, large and loose like a Dutchman's. Moreover, a scarlet silk cap, with a long gold tassel, was perched awry over his left ear; so that altogether he seemed as if he were dressed out to enact the part of a Turk at a masquerade.

"Shall I cut you a *little* slice more ham, my love?" enquired Sir Christopher, in a mincing tone, as if he were afraid of receiving a box on the ears for not speaking civilly enough.

"No, Sir Christopher," answered the lady sharply: "you shan't send me a *little* ham, as you call it. I don't like the ham—and that's flat."

"And yet, my love—that is, my dear—" remonstrated the knight gently.

"And yet what?" demanded his wife.

"I *think* I had the pleasure of helping you three times, my love," added Sir Christopher, astonished at his own boldness in uttering the words, the moment they had escaped his lips.

"Three times!" ejaculated the lady, turning as red as her ribands or as her husbands trowsers. "And if I like to be helped six times—or nine times, Sir Christopher—what should you say *then*?"

"Well, my love—I should say—"

"What should you say?" again asked the lady, assuming a menacing attitude.

"Why, my love—that you had a very good appetite," responded the knight, looking as miserable as if he expected eight finger nails to fasten on his cheeks the very next moment.

"I have no appetite, Sir Christopher!" cried the lady in a petulant tone, as she sank back again into her lounging attitude: "three miserable bits of ham, and a trifle of cold pie, with may be a taste of the chicken, and just one cut out of the tongue—"

"And two eggs, my love," suggested Sir Christopher meekly.

"Well—and two tiny eggs," continued the lady;—"I am sure all that does n't say much for one's appetite. Why, when I was at Lady Hatfield's, I used to eat three great rounds of bread-and-butter, crustesses and all."

"But you are no longer at Lady Hatfield's, my angel," said Sir Christopher, smirking; "you are with one who adores you—who has given you his name—a name, I flatter myself, that carries weight with it, in certain quarters; although, when I did so far forget myself as to put up for Portsoken—"

"Now, Sir Christopher, pray let us have none of that nonsense, if *you* please!" interrupted Lady Blunt, in a tone and with a manner which showed that she knew full well she should be obeyed. "I can't a-bear to hear even the word *Alderman* mentioned, ever since a lady I lived with once in the City talked something about the Guildhall police-court when she missed the silver spoons—"

"My dear, my dear," said Sir Christopher; "you forget that you are now Lady Blunt! Pray let us change the topic."

"Well, so we will," she cried sharply; "and I'll tell you what we'll talk about."

"What, my best love?" asked the knight.

"Your best love!" almost shrieked the lady. "Then you must have other loves, if I'm your best! Oh! Sir Christopher, was it to hear this that I gave up every thing—all my prospects in life—to become yours?"

"My dear girl," said the knight meekly, "I most humbly submit to you that I do not think you had so very much to give up when I asked you to become Lady Blunt."

"What! do you call a good place and being my own mistress, nothing to give up?" cried Charlotte. "Twenty-four guineas a-year, and the chance of marrying a Duke or a Prince!"

"Well—well, my love, we will not dispute," said the knight, who in his heart wished to God that she never *had* given up the prospects she spoke of, or that she *had* married some Duke or Prince—in which latter case Sir Christopher would not have envied either his Grace or his Royal Highness, after the trifling experience he had already enjoyed relative to the fair one's temper.

"No—I should think *you* would *not* dispute, either, Sir Christopher!" cried the vixen, tossing her head. "But I was going to tell you what we would talk about, when you interrupted me so rudely. I was going to say that I do not approve of that ham—or yet the chicken—or yet the tongue; and I do not mean to have my breakfast spoilt in this way. Ring the bell, Sir Christopher."

"My dearest Charlotte—"

"Ring the bell, Sir Christopher!" repeated the lady in a still more authoritative tone, as she looked daggers—nay, regular bayonets—at her miserable husband.

The knight rang the bell accordingly, gulping down a sigh—a very profound sigh—at the same time.

A footman answered the summons.

"John!" said the mistress of the house.

"Yes, my lady," was the reply.

"Tell Mrs. Bodkin to step up—*immediately*," added the wife of Sir Christopher's rash choice.

"Yes, my lady;"—and the footman disappeared, thanking his stars that he was not "in for it,"—the bad humour of his mistress being very evident indeed.

In due time Mrs. Bodkin made her appearance, in the shape of a stout, matronly-looking female, "of a certain age," as a housekeeper ought to be;—for Mrs. Bodkin was neither more nor less than that high female functionary in the establishment.

"Mrs. Bodkin!" said Lady Blunt, endeavouring to distort her really pretty face into as stern an expression as possible.

"Yes, my lady," returned the housekeeper.

"That ham is detestable, Mrs. Bodkin."

"Indeed, my lady."

"The cold fowls abominable!"

"Sure now, my lady!"

"And the tongue frightful!"

"Lawk-a-daisy!—your ladyship do n't say so!"

"I do say so, though, Mrs. Bodkin!" cried Sir Christopher's better half; "and I just tell you what it is—I do n't mean to have my breakfast spoilt in this way; and if you can't find tradesmen who'll supply good things—"

"Why, please your ladyship," interrupted the housekeeper, quite astounded at these accusations against comestibles which she knew to be excellent: "Mr. Smuggs, who sent in the ham and tongue, is purveyor to His Majesty; and—"

"Then if His Majesty chooses to put up with Mr. Smuggs's rubbish, Lady Blunt will not," exclaimed the mistress of the house, glancing indignantly, first at the petrified Mrs. Bodkin and then at the dumb-founded Sir Christopher.

There was, as romancists say, an awful pause.

Mrs. Bodkin knew not whether she were standing on her head or her heels: Sir Christopher was in an equally strange state of bewilderment as to whether he had heard aright or was labouring under a delusion; and Lady Blunt was triumphant in the impression she had evidently made upon her audience.

"But, my dear angel—my love," at length stammered the knight, "surely you will not—that is, you cannot—I appeal to you, my sweet, as a woman of sound judgment—"

"Sound fiddlestick, Sir Christopher!" interrupted her ladyship contemptuously. "I know what I am saying, and I mean what I say. Mrs. Bodkin, I order you once for all not to deal no more at Smuggs's; and if you can't choose good things, you'd better pack up your things and go about your business."

Now it happened that Mrs. Bodkin had managed, during long years of servitude and by rigid economy, to scrape together a very comfortable independence; and, feeling that she *was* independent, she did not choose, as she afterwards observed to a friend, "to put up with any of missus's nonsense."

"Go about my business, eh!" she accordingly exclaimed. "Well, ma'am—the sooner I do that the better, I think: for since I can't give satisfaction here, I'd much rather resign at once."

"Resign!" echoed Lady Blunt, again turning as red as her ribands.

"Yes, ma'am," continued the housekeeper; "resign I said; and you ought to know that's the right

word—for I b'lieve you was n't always used to sit in the parlour."

"Oh! you wretch!" exclaimed Lady Blunt, now manifesting a violent inclination to go off into hysterics. "Sir Christopher! can you sit there and bear me insulted by that owdacious woman? Turn her out of the house, Sir Christopher—let her bundle, neck and crop, this minute!"

"I rather think there's no need for bundling in the matter," said the indignant Mrs. Bodkin. "Sir Christopher is too much of a gentleman to ill-treat me, after being eleven years in his service come next April. But I do n't require no favours at your hands, ma'am—leastways, I would n't except them if they was offered."

And in a most stately manner Mrs. Bodkin walked out of the room, leaving the door wide open behind her.

"Sir Christopher!" exclaimed Lady Blunt, bursting into tears—but tears of rage, and not shame.

"Yes, my love," said the knight, who was rendered so nervous by this scene that he appeared to be labouring under incipient *delirium tremens*.

"You're a brute, Sir Christopher!" cried the angel in the pea-green wrapper and the red bows.

"My dear!—my love!" stammered the knight. "It was not my fault—you brought it on yourself—I really think—"

"Oh! I did, did I?" screeched Charlotte; and, unable to control the fury of her passion, she darted upon Sir Christopher, adown whose cheeks the marks of her nails were in another moment rendered most disagreeably visible.

"Lady Blunt!" vociferated the miserable man, struggling to extricate himself from the power of the fury.

"There! now I've taught you not to nag me on another time," said Charlotte, throwing herself back into her chair, already sorry and ashamed for what she had done, but too deeply imbued with vulgar and mean-spirited pride to manifest the least proof of such compunction.

Sir Christopher wiped his bleeding face with his cambric pocket-handkerchief: but his heart was too full to speak. He felt all the indignity which he had just sustained—and yet he had not courage enough to resent it.

The embarrassment of the newly-married pair was relieved, or rather interrupted, by a loud and unusually long double knock, which at that moment awoke every echo, not only in the house itself, but also half-way up Jermyn Street.

A few minutes elapsed, and then the footman entered the breakfast-parlour to announce to Sir Christopher that a gentleman, who had been shown into the drawing-room, wished to speak to him immediately upon most urgent business.

At the same time the servant placed upon the table a card, bearing the name of CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS.

"Tell the gentleman I'll be with him in a moment, John," said Sir Christopher.

The servant bowed and retired.

"Do you know who he is?" asked Lady Blunt.

"No, I do not," responded the knight, more sulky than he had ever yet dared to speak to his wife.

"Come, now, Sir Christopher," exclaimed her ladyship; "do n't have any of your ill-humours with me, because I can't a-bear them. Say you're sorry

for what you've done, and I'll not only forgive you, but also patch your face for you with diakkulum plaster. Come, now—do what I tell you."

And as her ladyship seemed to examine her finger nails, as she spoke, in a manner which portended her readiness to make another onslaught, the miserable husband muttered a few words of abject apology for an offence which he had not committed, and the amiable Charlotte vouchsafed a pardon which she should rather have besought than bestowed.

Then there was a little fond—or rather foolish kissing and hugging; and this farce being concluded, the lady hastened to fulfil her promise relative to the diachylon plaster.

When this operation was likewise ended, Sir Christopher cast a rueful glance into the looking-glass over the mantel; and never did a more miserable wight see reflected a more woefully patched countenance. The wretchedness depicted on that face, apart from the long slips of plaster stuck upon the cheeks, contrasted in a most ludicrous fashion with the absurd splendour of the knight's morning attire; and, to use a common phrase, he wished himself at the devil, as he wended his mournful way to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER LXI.

CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS.

CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS was a gentleman of Irish extraction, and, according to his own account, possessed of vast estates in the Emerald Island; but it was evident to all his friends that the rents were very irregularly paid, inasmuch as their gallant proprietor was frequently under the necessity of soliciting the loan of a guinea, and when he could not obtain that sum, his demand would suddenly drop to half-a-crown or even eighteen-pence.

But whenever the Captain talked of his estates, no one ventured to suggest a doubt relative to their existence; for the gallant officer was a notorious duellist, having been engaged as principal in thirty-seven of those pleasant little contests, and as second in ninety-two more.

He was about forty-five years of age, and of exceedingly fierce appearance. His crown was entirely bald; but huge bushes of red hair stuck out between his temples and his ears—enormous whiskers of the same meteoric hue and portent covered half his face—and a formidable pair of moustaches, red also, curled ominously over his upper lip, the ends being twisted and greased so as to look like two small tails.

In person he was tall, thin, but not ill-made. He held himself particularly upright; and as he wore a military undress coat, all frogged and braided in the Polish fashion, and grey trousers with red stripes down the legs, he really looked like what he called himself and was called by others—namely, a CAPTAIN.

But he was not wont to be more explicit relative to his military services than he was definite concerning the locality of his estates. No one knew, and assuredly no one ever ventured to ask him, to what regiment he had belonged. He stated himself to be *unattached*; and that was sufficient.

We should, as faithful chroniclers, observe that it had been whispered—but then, scandal is so rife in this wicked world!—that Captain O'Blunderbuss was never in the army at all, and that his formidable name was merely an assumed one; and the newsmonsters who propagated these reports behind the gallant gentleman's back, not only ridiculed the idea of his estates, but actually carried their malignant spite so far as to insinuate that he was once the driver of a jaunting-car in Dublin, and at that period bore the name of Teddy O'Flaherty.

Be all this as it may, it is nevertheless very certain that Captain O'Blunderbuss was a great man about town—that he was nodded to by loungers in the Park—shaken hands with by dandies in Bond Street—and invariably chosen as a second in every duel that took place on Wormwood Scrubs, Wimbledon Common, or Battersea Fields.

Such was the terrible individual who was standing on the rug, in a most ferocious attitude, when Sir Christopher Blunt entered the drawing-room.

The Captain desisted from twirling his moustaches, and indulged in a good long stare at the knight, whose half-ludicrous, half-doleful appearance was certainly remarkable enough to attract an unusual degree of attention.

"You resayved my car-r-d, Sir Christopher Blunt?" said the Captain, speaking in a strong Irish accent, and rattling the r in a truly menacing manner.

"Yes, sir—I received the card of Captain O'Blunderbuss," replied Sir Christopher, not knowing what to think or make of his strange visitor.

"And, sure, I'm Capthain O'Blunther-r-bass!" exclaimed the military gentleman, twirling his moustache; "and I've come on the par-r-t of my friend Capthain Morthaunt—an honour-r-able man, Sir-r Christopher Blunt!" added the gentleman emphatically, looking awfully fierce at the same time, just as if the unfortunate knight entertained the idea of questioning the honour of Captain Mordaunt.

"I—I've no doubt of it, sir," stammered the intimidated Blunt, looking more wretched in proportion as the tone of his visitor became more excited.

"By the power-rs, I'm glad ye doubt it!" cried the Captain; "or you'd find yerself desayved in yer man. Well, Sir-r Christopher, the shor-t and the long of the affair is just this:—My friend Capthain Mordaunt feels himself aggrieved on behalf of his sither-r, and he's put the little business into my hands to manage for-r him."

"I'm convinced that Captain Mordaunt could not have chosen a better friend, Captain O'Blunderbuss," said the knight, scarcely able to utter a word, so sorely was he oppressed by vague alarms. "But I hope—that is, I mean, I—in a word—"

"What do ye mane?" demanded the Captain, advancing a pace or two towards the knight.

"Oh! nothing—only—" stammered Sir Christopher, dodging round the table, for fear that the formidable O'Blunderbuss intended an attack upon him.

"Only what, man?" vociferated the Captain. "Sure, now, ye don't think I'm afther aying ye up!"

"No—oh! no! I'm not afraid of any gentleman eating me, exactly," observed Sir Christopher. "But if you would state the object of your visit—"

"Be Jasus! and that's soon done!" exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss. "The shor-rt facts is these:—Capthain Morthaunt is mightily attached to his sistler-r, Miss Julia, who's a most amiable lady—for I've jist been breakfasting with her-r and her-r brother at their lodgings in Half Moon Street. Miss Morthaunt, as per-rhaps you are aware, returned home to her father's mansion—a sweet place, by the bye, in Connamar-r-ra—when you desayyed her in the most gross—the most infamous manner, by running away with a lady's-maid instead of her dear self—"

"Captain O'Blunderbuss," said Sir Christopher, "she of whom you speak is now Lady Blunt."

"And much good may she do ye, Sir Christopher!" exclaimed the Captain. "But, as I was saying, Miss Morthaunt comes back to London again, smar-rting under the influence of her wrongs, which her brother has resolved to avenge. And, therefore, Sir Christopher, you'll be so good as jist to say whether it shall be on Wor-rmwood Ser-rubs or Wimbledon Common; and we'll be there punctual to-morrow morning at eight o'clock."

The worthy knight looked perfectly aghast. He began to understand the real drift of Captain O'Blunderbuss's visit; and he entertained the most unmitigated abhorrence of the mere idea of a duel.

"Well, Sir Christopher, say the wor-rld!" resumed the gallant gentleman with as much unconcern as if he were making arrangements for a party of pleasure. "But per-rhaps ye'd like to consult a frind—or refer-r me to him. That's the best way! Leave it to your frind and me; and we'll settle everything so comfortable that you'll not have the least throuble in the wor-rld. You can get your breakfast a thrifle earlier than usual—"

"Breakfast!" echoed Sir Christopher, in a deep sepulchral tone; "breakfast—when one is going out to be shot at!"

"Be the power-rs! and why not?" demanded the warlike Captain. "But here we are, wasting our precious time, while we ought to be settling the little business and thrying the pisthols at the Gallery."

"The pisthols!" groaned Sir Christopher, his visage lengthening most awfully, and his under-jaw completely dropping through intense alarm.

"Be Jasus! and what would ye fight with, if it is n't pisthols?" cried the Captain.

"But pisthols—pisthols are so apt to—to—kill people," observed the knight, shaking from head to foot.

"Is it afraid ye are?" demanded Captain O'Blunderbuss, twirling his moustache, as he surveyed Sir Christopher with cool contempt.

"I do not admit such an imputation," answered the knight; "but I will not fight with this mad-cap Mordaunt. The law shall be my protection. I am my own master—I married whom I chose—and I will not be bullied by any man living."

The astonishment depicted on the countenance of Captain O'Blunderbuss, as these words met his ears, was mistaken by the knight for a feeling of apprehension; and thus he had grown bold, or at least energetic in his language, as he had proceeded.

"Yes, sir," he added emphatically, "the law shall protect me."

"Is it shir-rking that ye mane?" asked the Captain. "Becase, if it is, I shall feel myself bound to

administer a decent drubbing to ye, Sir Christopher. Why, sir—it's a rare insult to me to refuse to fight with my frind!"

And, as he uttered these words, the Captain advanced in a menacing fashion towards the knight.

"Keep off, sir! do n't attempt violence against me!" exclaimed Sir Christopher Blunt, rushing towards the fire-place to seize the poker. "I'll not stand it, Captain O'Blunderbuss—I have been a Sheriff in my time—I once put up for Poitsoken—and I'll not submit to any insult."

"Then name your frind, sir!" thundered the gallant officer; "or I'll not lave a whole bone in your sku."

"Well—I will, I will!" ejaculated Sir Christopher, anxious to get rid of his fire-eating visitor on any terms. "Go to my nephew, Mr. Frank Curtis: he has killed his man often enough—according to lus own account—"

"Be the power-rs! that jist suits me to a tay!" exclaimed the Captain; "for may be he and me could jist amuse ourselves with an exchange of shots afther you and my frind Morthaunt have settled your own small thrifle. 'T would be a perfect God-send to me; and I've no doubt your nev-ry will be of the same mind. Where does he hang out?"

Sir Christopher hastily mentioned the address of Mr. Frank Curtis; and Captain O'Blunderbuss stalked away, hugely delighted at the idea of being about to form the acquaintance of a gentleman every way so worthy of his friendship as the knight's nephew appeared to be.

Fierce indeed was the aspect of Captain O'Blunderbuss as he marched through the streets to the address indicated by the knight; and to the great joy of the military gentleman, he found, on his arrival, that Mr. Frank Curtis was at home.

"But he's not up yet, sir," said the spruce-looking tiger who opened the front door at which the Captain had given one of his tremendous double knocks.

"Never mind, my boy," exclaimed the visitor in an awe-inspiring tone. "Your masther will be glad to see me, or I'm mightily desayyed."

"What name shall I say, sir?" inquired the tiger.

"Faith! and I'll jist take my name up along with me, my lad," returned the Captain. "Which floor may it be now?"

"First floor, sir,—and the bed-room's at the back."

"By Jasus! you're a smar-rt lad, and a credit to your masther!" exclaimed the Captain. "The next time I come, I'll make ye a present of sixpence."

And with these words Captain O'Blunderbuss marched up stairs.

On reaching the landing, he knocked at the back-room door with his fist, as if he were practising how to fell an ox; and to this peremptory summons an invitation to "come in" was returned.

The Captain accordingly stalked into the chamber, where Mr. Frank Curtis was breakfasting in bed, a table well spread being drawn up close by the side of his couch.

"Be Jasus! I knew you was a boy afther my own heart!" ejaculated the Captain, as he caught sight of a bottle of whiskey which stood near the teapot: then, closing the door, he advanced up to the bed, and, pulling off his buckskin glove, said, "Misther Curtis, here's my hand. Tip us your's my

boy—and let's know each other without any more pothee."

Mr. Frank Curtis accepted the proffered hand with delight; for the amiable deportment of the visitor now relieved his mind from the vague fears that had been excited in it by the unceremonious entry and ferocious appearance of the Captain.

"And how are ye, Misther Curtis?" continued this gentleman, drawing a chair close to the bed, and depositing his gloves in his hat, and his hat on the table.

"Quite blooming, old fellow, thank'ee!" returned Frank, to whom all this familiarity was by no means displeasing. "But what will you take? shall I ring for another cup and plate? or will you take a dram of the whiskey?"

"The potheen, my boy—the potheen for me!" exclaimed the Captain, grasping the bottle.

"You'll find it rather good, I fancy," said Curtis. "My friend the Russian Ambassador sent it round last night, with his best respects——"

"And my respects to him and to you both!" cried the Captain: then, having drained his glass, he drew a long breath, and said, "Be Jasus! that's some of the right sort!"

"Help yourself then, old fellow!" said Frank, in as free and easy a manner as if he had known his visitor all his life. "I can get plenty more where that came from. Old Brandykouski, the Polish Ambassador's butler, has had orders to give me the entire run of his master's cellar; for me and his Excellency are as thick as two thieves. He is pestering me from morning to night to dine with him——"

"No wonther, Misther Curtis!" interrupted the Captain; "for you're the most agreeable jintleman I've the honour to be acquainted with."

"And what's your name, old boy?" asked Frank, as he proceeded with his breakfast.

"Captain O'Blunderbuss, at your service, my dear frind," was the answer, while the individual who gave it helped himself to another glass of the whiskey, which was certainly the best that the *Stilton Cheese* round the corner could supply.

"Delighted to form your acquaintance, Captain!" exclaimed Curtis, suddenly becoming a trifle less familiar,—for the name was well known to him, in connexion too with the notoriety of a duellist.

"And might I inquire what business——"

"Oh! we'll talk about that presently," interrupted the Captain. "Your uncle, Sir-r Christopher Blunt, recommended you to me in the strongest terms—the most flatter-ring terms, I may say——"

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mr. Curtis, with unfeigned surprise—for he had not seen, nor spoken to the knight for some weeks.

"Be the power-rs! he gave you a splendid character, Misther Curtis!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss; "and it was quite longing to know ye, I was. But we'll talk on business presently. I'm in no hurry—and we'll have a cozie chat first. May be my name is not altogether strange to ye?"

"By no means," answered Curtis, now thoroughly convinced that the object of his new friend's visit was altogether of an amicable character. "I have heard of your renown, and must say that I have envied it. But I've done a little in the same line myself—chiefly in France, though. I'll be bound the name of the Marquis of Soupe-Maigre is not unknown to you."

"Yes—I've heard spake of it," returned the Captain, helping himself to another glass of whiskey.

"Well—the Duke and me fought with small swords for three hours one morning," continued Frank; "and at length I managed to scratch the little finger of his left hand. In France, you know, a duel always ends when the first blood is drawn; and so the Count flung away his sword, acknowledged that I'd beat him, and we've been bosom friends ever since."

"Give me your hand, my broth of a boy!" exclaimed the Captain: "I was not desayved in you! You're as fine spirited as your potheen. Why! be the power-rs, you're a confir-rmed duellist!"

"To be sure! and I have killed my man, too," responded Frank, delighted to perceive that he had made a deep impression on his companion. "There was the famous Spaniard, you know—what was his name again? Oh! ah! Don Juan Stiletto del Guerilla! He was a dreadful fellow—the terror of all Paris, where he was staying when I was also there. Well, one evening—it was at the King's fancy-ball—this Portuguese fellow gave himself such airs that there was no bearing him. He insulted all the gentlemen, and smirked at all the ladies. At length the Archbishop of Paris, who was in full canonicals, appealed to me to put down the insolent Italian; I undertook the task—and picked a quarrel with him in no time. The ladies all looked upon me as one devoted to death: and though I say it who should n't, a great deal of tender sympathy was shown towards me. Well, next morning me and the German met on the very top of Montmartre; and in a quarter of an hour my gentleman was weltering in his blood. That affair won for me the love of the beautiful Countess of Dunkirk—but she is gone down to the tomb—and I am left behind to mourn her loss!"

And Mr. Frank Curtis took a large bite of a muffin, doubtless to subdue the sigh which rose to his lips at this sad reminiscence.

"Be the holy poker-r! it's a touching business!" cried the Captain, who had by this time fully seen through the mendacious braggadoocio of Mr. Frank Curtis, and had come to the conclusion that he was as great a coward in reality as his uncle.

But the gallant Captain O'Blunderbuss did not choose to suffer the young gentleman to perceive that he understood him, as the whiskey was too much to his taste to allow him to lose the chance of emptying the bottle by a too precipitate rupture.

Frank, firmly believing that all his fine stories were taken as gospel by his visitor, rattled away in his usual style—heaping lie upon lie at such a rate, that, had his falsehoods been mountains, the piling thereof would have outdone the feats of Titan with Ossa and Pelion.

At length the Captain began to thrust in a few words edgewise, as the contents of the bottle got lower and lower.

"Your uncle, Misther Curtis, seems a nice old jintleman. His face was rarely plastered this mornin', as if he'd been in the war-r-rs a thrifle or so."

"Perhaps his wife had been giving him a taste of her claws?" said Frank, with a coarse giggle.

"Be Saint Path-rick! and that's just what struck me!" exclaimed the Captain.

"She's a very devil, I know," continued Frank. "But, I say, old fellow—what little business was



it that took you to old Sir Christopher's, and made him refer you to me?"

"Is it the little business?" cried the Captain. "Och? and be Jasus! then, it's jist that affair of my friend Morthaunt, who manes to shoot Sir Christopher-r to-mor-r-row mor-r-r-ning before breakfast."

"Shoot Sir Christopher!" ejaculated Frank, apparently more surprised than annoyed.

"Or else jist get shot himself, be the power-rs!" added Captain O'Blunderbuss. "And it's becace it's myself that's Morthaunt's frind, Sir Christopher has referred me to you as his frind."

"Then it's a regular duel?" said Frank, opening his eyes wider and wider.

"The purtiest little affair I ever had a finger in, Misther Curtis," responded the Captain, now looking tremendously fierce; for although he had imbibed at least a pint of pure spirit without experiencing the least inconvenience in respect to his brain, the effects were nevertheless apparent in an awful rubicundity of countenance: "the purtiest little affair, certainly," he continued; "and it now only remains for you and me jist to settle the

place—time being of cour-rse in the mornin at eight."

"And do you mean to say that my old uncle has agreed to fight this duel with Captain Mordaunt?" inquired Frank.

"Be Jasus! it's for you to bring him to the scratch, Misther Curtis; or else——"

"Or else what?" demanded the young gentleman, oppressed by a vague presentiment of evil.

"Or else, be the holy poker-r! you must fight *me*," returned Captain O'Blunderbuss, twirling his moustache in the coolest and calmest manne possible.

"Fight *you*?" ejaculated Frank, turning ashy pale.

"As a matther of cour-rse," answered the Captain. "A famous duellist like Misther Curtis, can't be at a loss on a point of honour."

"But why the devil should I fight *you*?" demanded the young gentleman, his heart palpitating audibly.

"Why the devil should n't ye?" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss. "Answer me that, my frind?"

"My dear sir—it's really—I mean, you—that is

to say, I think, with all due deference——” stammered Frank, growing every moment more and more alarmed.

“Be Jasus! I’ve said nothing I don’t mane to stick to!” exclaimed the martial gentleman, now assuming an expression of countenance so fierce that Frank Curtis began to have serious misgivings that his visitor intended to assault him then and there.

“But, my dear Captain——this proceeding——” said Frank, assuming a tone of excruciating politeness.

“Is going on beautifully, Misther Curtis. And so, as you seem to have a little delicacy in putting yourself too farward in the matther,” continued the Captain, “we’ll jist say Battersea Fields, to-morrow mornin’, at eight o’clock. Good bye, Misther Curtis.”

With these words the Captain took up his hat, and stalked majestically out of the room, banging the door violently after him.

Frank Curtis fell back in his bed, and gave vent to his feelings in a deep groan.

The door opened again with a crash; and the Captain thrust in his inflamed visage, exclaiming, “Ye’ll remember, Misther Curtis, that I hould ye responsible in this matther; and that if ye can’t bring the uncle to the scratch, ye must come yourself; or, be Jasus! I’ll be afther ye to the inds of the ear-rth!”

The head was withdrawn again, and the door once more slammed violently.

Frank Curtis gave a hollow moan, thrust himself down in the bed, and drew the clothes over his face, as if to shut out some dreadful spectre from his sight.

CHAPTER LXII.

FRANK’S EMBARRASMENTS.

Tirus remained Mr. Frank Curtis for some minutes—each moment expecting that the bed-room door would again open, and that the voice of the terrible Irishman would once more convey some hideous menace to his ears.

But Captain O’Blunderbuss had fairly departed this time; and at length the miserable young man slowly pushed down the clothes, and glanced timidly round the room.

It was no dream—as for an instant he had endeavoured to make himself believe that it was; for there was the chair in the very place where the Captain had sat—there also was the bottle which the Captain had condescended to empty.

“A duel!” groaned Frank, in a sepulchral voice—he who had fought so many in imagination!

Then he remembered that there existed a means of averting all danger from himself; and, elated by the sudden thought, he leapt nimbly from his bed, with the affectionate intention of proceeding forthwith to his uncle, and compelling the old gentleman to go forth and be shot at, whether by Captain Mordaunt or Captain O’Blunderbuss, Frank did not care a fig.

Having hastily dressed himself, the young gentleman hurried off to Jermyn Street: and, on his arrival, he was surprised to find the knight’s travelling-carriage at the door, while the servants were busily employed in piling up portmanteaus, and hat-boxes, and bandboxes, and carpet-bags.

“Halloa!” cried Frank to Jeffreys, the groom, who was in the act of hoisting one of the aforesaid articles of luggage to another servant who stood upon the roof of the vehicle: “what does all this mean?”

“Means travelling, Mr. Frank,” responded the domestic. “The order was given in a violent hurry—and so I haven’t a moment to spare. But here’s master and her ladyship.”

And, sure enough, Sir Christopher and Lady Blunt made their appearance at that instant, the former enveloped in his great coat and with a silk handkerchief tied round all the lower part of his face,—and Charlotte muffled in a splendid cloak.

“I say, Sir Christopher!” cried Frank: “this won’t do at any price, you know.”

“What won’t do, sir?” demanded the knight in a stern tone. “Now, then, Jeffreys—down with the steps.”

“Yes, sir:”—and the steps were lowered accordingly.

Frank stood aghast, as he saw the knight hand his better half into the carriage: and the said better half pouted up her really pretty mouth in a disdainful manner as she passed the foul-mouth.

Sir Christopher was about to follow her into the vehicle, when Frank suddenly seized him by the skirts of his great coat, exclaiming, “You shan’t sneak off in this manner: you shall stay to——”

“To what?” growled Sir Christopher from the depths of the silk handkerchief which came up to his nose.

“To be shot at!” returned Frank, almost driven to desperation.

The lady inside uttered a scream—Sir Christopher gave a desperate groan, and, breaking away from his nephew, rushed into the carriage—Jeffreys put up the steps and banged the door—and the vehicle rolled away, leaving Curtis standing alone on the pavement, the very picture of the most ludicrous despair.

What was to be done now? The formidable Captain O’Blunderbuss held him—yes, him—Frank Curtis—answerable for the appearance of Sir Christopher Blunt on the field of battle; otherwise—but the alternative was too dreadful to think of!

What, then, was to be done? Frank saw the impossibility of nerving himself so as to encounter the desperate fire-eater; and yet he knew that the Captain would find him out, even if he removed his abode from the West-End to West Smithfield.

Yet something *must* be done—and that speedily; for it was now two o’clock in the afternoon—and next morning at eight the Captain would expect him at the place of appointment.

An idea struck Frank—he would go and consult Mr. Howard, the attorney.

To that gentleman’s offices he accordingly repaired, composing himself by the way as well as he could, so as not to express by his countenance the alarms which agitated within his breast.

Mr. Howard was disengaged, and gave him an immediate audience.

“Well, I hope you’re satisfied, now that you hanged that poor fellow yesterday morning,” said Frank, as he took the chair to which the solicitor pointed.

“It was a duty which I owed to society,” returned Howard, laconically, as if the subject were not altogether a pleasant one.

“What an idea!” ejaculated Frank. “But, however, it is done, and can’t be undone. After all, he was a brave fellow—a man just such as I could have admired, barring the highway part of his calling. And now, you who are such a stickler about duties to society, and so on—suppose you heard, for instance, that a duel was going to take place between some friends of yours and another party—of course you’d

do all you could to stop it—you'd go to Bow Street, and you'd give private information concerning the *where* and the *when*;—or perhaps you'd speak openly, and get the persons bound over to keep the peace—eh?"

"I should not do anything of the kind," answered Howard, who already began to suspect that Mr. Frank Curtis had some special reason of his own for speaking with so much earnestness—indeed, with such an air of appeal, as he now displayed.

"You would n't—eh?" exclaimed Frank, grievously disappointed at the ill-success of his little manœuvre. "And why not?"

"Because I should only lose my time for nothing," responded Mr. Howard.

"The devil! Then, did you get Tom Rain hanged because the prosecution put money into your pocket?" demanded Frank.

"Did you merely come to chatter with me, or on business?" asked the lawyer evasively. "If the former, I am busy—if the latter, make haste and explain yourself."

"Well—the fact is," continued Frank, now feeling certain that the entire affair of Tom Rain's prosecution was a very sore subject with the lawyer,—“the fact is, I wanted to speak to you about a little matter—in which my precious old uncle has placed me in a complete fix—not that I care about a duel, you know—I'd see a duel damned first, before I'd care for it—still—”

"Still you would rather not fight it?" observed Mr. Howard, with a slight curl of the lip.

"You see, my dear fellow," proceeded Curtis, "that I have so many affairs of my own to attend to, I really cannot undertake to conduct those of other people. There's my marriage with Mrs. Goldberry coming off in a few days—and now, bother to it! up starts this duel-business—”

"Do explain yourself, Frank!" exclaimed Howard impatiently.

"Well, I will—and in a few words, too. It seems that Captain Mordaunt has taken a tiff at my uncle's conduct towards his sister; and so he sends Captain O'Blunderbuss—”

"Captain O'Blunderbuss, eh!" ejaculated the attorney, now becoming suddenly interested in the narrative of Mr. Curtis.

"Yes: a terrible-looking, wild Irishman," returned this young gentleman: "but he didn't frighten me, though—I should think not! Do you know him?"

"Only by name," answered Mr. Howard coolly, as he glanced at a suspicious-looking slip of parchment that lay upon his desk. "But go on."

"Well, this O'Blunderbuss, it appears, goes to my uncle, who refers him to me—naturally enough, seeing that I am pretty well experienced in all matters of duelling," pursued Frank. "So the Captain calls on me a couple of hours ago; and we discuss the business in a very friendly way. Every thing is settled pleasantly enough; but before the Captain takes his leave, I catch hold of him by the button, and let him know that if he fails to produce his principal on the ground to-morrow morning, after all the trouble entailed on me, I shall hold *him* answerable accordingly. The Captain looks rather glum at that, because I did tumble down upon him a little unexpectedly with my threat. However, he agrees; and we separate. But, lo and behold! I go to Sir Christopher to tell him how comfortably I have settled the whole business for him—and he is gone—fled—bolted—mizzled—cut his stick—baggage and all, including his wife!"

"And, therefore," observed Howard coolly, "you will have to fight Captain O'Blunderbuss, because *you* will not be able to produce *your* principal."

"It's just this that bothers me," exclaimed Frank. "If the man had offended me, I should n't of course mind: in that case, one of us should never quit the ground alive—for I'm a desperate fellow, when once I am in earnest. But here's a poor devil who has never done me any injury, but who seems to me to be a capital hand at the whiskey-bottle,—and my fire-eating temper places us both in that position which compels *him* almost, poor creature! to insist on our exchanging shots. I really feel for the Captain—”

"And not at all for yourself, Frank?" said the lawyer, in his usual quiet manner.

"Oh! not an atom!" ejaculated Mr. Curtis. "But do n't you admit that something ought to be done to prevent Captain O'Blunderbuss from becoming the victim of a display of temper so unjust and unequal for on my part? I wish to heaven my friend the Duke of the Tower Hamlets was in town—he would pretty soon put matters on a proper footing, and save me from the chance of killing a man that has never injured me. But as his lordship the Marquis is *not* in town, why—I must throw myself on your friendship."

"Well—I will undertake to prevent the duel, in this case," said Howard, speaking as quietly as if he believed every word of Mr. Frank Curtis's version of the affair.

"Will you, though?" cried the young man, unable to conceal his joy.

"I will indeed," returned Howard. "so make your mind perfectly easy on that head. Where is the duel—or rather, where ought it to take place?"

"In Battersea Fields, to-morrow morning, at eight precisely," answered Frank.

"Very good," said the lawyer. "Now, you must be with me at a quarter before seven—here, at my office; and I will have a chaise ready to take us there."

"But need we go at all?" asked Frank, his countenance suddenly assuming a woeful expression again.

"We *must* go to the field," replied the solicitor; "but trust to me to settle the matter when we *do* get there. Again I tell you not to make yourself uneasy: I will guarantee the complete settlement of the affair—and in a most peremptory manner too."

"Thank'ee kindly," returned Frank, again reassured.

"You have taken a load from my breast: not that I care about fighting, you know—but it must be in a good cause. That was just what I said when my best friend, the Prince of Scandinavia—”

"There's enough of it for the present, Frank," interrupted the lawyer. "Leave the affair to me—and I shall manage it to your complete satisfaction. Be here at a quarter to seven—not a minute later—to-morrow morning,—and now you must permit me to attend to my own engagements."

Frank Curtis took the hint and his leave accordingly, wondering how the lawyer would so manage matters as to subdue the terrible fire-eating propensities of the redoubtable Captain O'Blunderbuss. Nevertheless, the young man placed implicit reliance upon Mr. Howard's promise; and it was with a comparatively light heart that he sped towards the dwelling of Mrs. Goldberry in Baker Street.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE MEETING IN BATTERSEA FIELDS.

ACCORDING to instructions given to his landlady, Mr. Frank Curtis was called at a quarter to six on the morning following the incidents just related; and leaping from his warm bed, he proceeded, with quivering limbs and chattering teeth, to strike a light.

Having, after a great deal of trouble, persuaded the short wick of his candle to catch the flame of the match which he held to it, he drew aside the window-curtains and looked forth to ascertain the nature of the weather.

The result of this survey was by no means reassuring; for a mizzling rain was falling, and a cheerless mist appeared to hang against the window.

Frank closed the curtains again, and looked wistfully at the bed, as if he were more than half inclined to return to it, and leave Captain O'Blunderbuss to do his worst;—but, on second thoughts, he knew that this was a hazardous venture—and, accordingly, he began to huddle on a portion of his garments.

Then commenced the process of shaving—always an unpleasant one, but doubly so by candle-light, and when the hand is so nervous that the chances are equal whether you mow off the hirsute stubble or the tip of your nose.

"Bother to this razor!" cried Frank: "it won't cut at all this morning!"

The fault was not, however, in the razor, but with him who wielded it.

At length, by dint of reiterated scraping, and steadying the right wrist with the left hand, Mr. Frank Curtis managed to achieve this portion of his toilette.

When occupied with his ablutions, he thought that the water had never appeared so icy cold before; and his teeth chattered like a box of dominoes rattling.

The fact was, that the nearer the eventful moment approached, the more alarmed became this heroic young gentleman, lest the lawyer should disappoint him, or deceive himself, in the task of taming the formidable Captain O'Blunderbuss.

It was half-past six before Mr. Curtis quitted his bed-room; and he had just time to take a cup of coffee in his sitting apartment while the girl of the house ran to fetch a cab. She speedily returned with, or rather in the vehicle; but when Mr. Curtis had taken her place, he perceived to his dismay that the horse had such an unpleasant knack of suddenly bolting round each corner he came to, and the driver was already so drunk, even at that early hour in the morning, that the chances were decidedly in favour of an upset.

He, however, reached the lawyer's office in safety, though not before the clocks at the West-End were striking seven.

A hackney-coach was already waiting at the door; and the moment Frank rang the office-bell, Mr. Howard appeared.

"Come, jump in—we have not a minute to lose," said the latter.

Frank accordingly entered the coach, in which, to his surprise, he found two ill-looking, shabbily-dressed fellows ensconced. Mr. Howard followed him—the door was closed hastily—and away rolled the vehicle in a westerly direction.

Mr. Curtis was now enabled to examine at his ease—or rather at his leisure, for easy he was not—the two individuals just mentioned.

One was a man of about forty, dressed in seedy

black, and with a beard of at least three days growth and a shirt that seemed as if it had been worn and slept in too for a fortnight. His face was pale and cadaverous, and its expression sinister in the extreme. His companion was worse-looking and dirtier still; but his countenance was red and bloated with intemperance. He carried a stout stick in his hand, and smelt awfully of rum.

"Got your pistols, Frank?" inquired Mr. Howard, when the coach had moved off the pavement.

"Pistols!" repeated the young gentleman, turning dreadfully pale. "I thought you—you—you—"

And his teeth chattered violently.

"I know what I promised; and what I promised I will perform," responded the attorney. "But I thought you might like to make a show of an intention to fight, before I interfered."

"Oh! you know I never bully," exclaimed Frank. "If I made a show of fighting, as you call it, I *would* fight—and not pretend merely."

"Well—just as you like," observed Howard. "We will settle the business the instant we get down there."

"But is the gen'lman sartain the Cap'n 'll be there?" asked the man with the stout stick and the red face.

"Hold your tongue, Progs!" growled his companion in the shabby black. "These gen'lmen know what they're up to."

Silence then prevailed in the vehicle; and Frank Curtis sat wondering who the strange-looking twain could be. At last he came to the conclusion that they must be constables whom Mr. Howard had called into requisition for the laudable purpose of putting a stop to the duel. Still, such seedy constables were seldom seen: but then, reasoned Frank within himself, they might perhaps be in a state of insolvency—a suspicion certainly warranted by their outward appearance.

The mist-like rain continued; and, though the morning grew a trifle brighter, it was in a very sickly manner. Frank had seldom felt more dispirited in his life, the weather leaguely itself with his own vague apprehensions to render him utterly miserable.

At length the coach reached the vicinity of Battersea Fields; and Mr. Howard pulled the check-string as a signal for the driver to stop.

He then descended; Frank Curtis followed; and the two queer-looking gentlemen alighted also.

"You will keep at a decent distance, Mr. Mac Grab," said Howard, addressing himself to the individual in seedy black.

"Wery good, sir. Progs," continued Mr. Mac Grab, turning to his companion, "you make a circum-bendibus like, so as to cut off the Captain's retreat down yonder. I'll skirt the river a short way, and then drop down on him."

"All right," growled Mr. Progs; and off he set in the direction indicated by his master, Mr. Mac Grab.

Howard then took Frank's arm; and they walked on together, the young gentleman shivering and trembling violently.

"What is the matter with you?" demanded the lawyer. "You shake just like an aspen."

"Oh! nothing—nothing!" returned Frank, in a faltering tone. "Only it's very cold this morning—and this cursed mist—But there's the Captain already!" he suddenly ejaculated, making a full stop.

Howard glanced in the same direction towards which Frank's eyes were turned, and beheld two individuals at a short distance. One, who was wrapped in a cloak, was standing still: the other was pacing rapidly up

and down in the immediate vicinity of his companion, and tossing his arms about as if in a perfect fury of indignation.

"Come on," said the lawyer, dragging forward the terrified Frank Curtis. "There! the person who is walking up and down like a maniac, has caught sight of us—"

"That's the Captain!" almost whimpered the young man. "Oh! my stars! how fierce he does look!"

"Now, then, ye shir-rkers! is it keeping us waiting ye mane?" vociferated the terrible Captain, sending his voice half-way across a field in a tone of awful indignation. "Be Jasus! it's a rare insult to me and my frind, to be seven minutes and a half behind time in this way!"

"We are coming, sir, as fast as we can!" exclaimed Howard: "and may be a little faster than you will find to be agreeable."

"My God! don't irritate him!" implored Frank. "He's capable of—of—shooting us both—as we walk along."

"Don't be such a fool, Frank. You will see a rare bit of fun in a few minutes. Come along!"—and the lawyer dragged his shrinking companion forward.

"Be the holy poker-r!" vociferated the Captain, as Howard and Curtis now drew near enough for him plainly to recognise their countenances: "be the holy poker!" he repeated, his eyes glaring furiously, "Sir Christopher is not here! Morthaunt, my dear frind, ye are swindled—robbed—plundered—chated of the pleasure of a duel this cold mornin'. But I'll avenge ye, my boy—for I tould that Misther Curtis there that I'd hold him responsible—"

"Come, come, Captain!" exclaimed Howard, as he and Frank now stopped at the distance of a few paces from the warlike officer and his friend Mordaunt: "don't bluster and sputter in this fine fashion—"

"Is it bluster and sputter to me ye mane!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss. "Be Jasus; sir-r—ye shall ate the wor-rds afore we're done. But I'll shoot Mr. Curtis first; and 'tis yourself I'll send headlong afther him. Morthaunt, my frind, instead of being principal now, 'tis second ye must be. So give us the pisthol-case from under your cloak, man."

"With all my heart, Captain!" said Mordaunt, who was a tall, awkward gentleman, about thirty-five years of age, and as like Miss Julia as brother could be to sister.

"Howard—my dear friend—my good fellow," gasped Frank Curtis in the ear of his companion; "is it possible that—that—you've—"

"Be Jasus! we're watched!" suddenly exclaimed the Captain, whose quick eye now caught sight of a man approaching from the next field.

"It's only my servant, sir, who is bringing my case of pistols," remarked Howard. "Not knowing whether you would be here, we kept them in the coach at a short distance."

"Not be here!" repeated the Captain. "Do ye take us for as great cowards as ould Sir Christopher Blunt? Be Jasus—But that man don't look like a servant anyhow!" ejaculated the warlike gentleman, interrupting himself, and fixing a ferocious look upon Mr. Mac Grab, who now came running up to the spot, completely out of breath.

Howard glanced rapidly to the left, and beheld Proggis approaching from that direction.

"Here's another fellow!" exclaimed Mordaunt, who had marked and followed the lawyer's scrutinizing look. Gentlemen, what does this mean?"

"Yes—and be Jasus!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss: "what does this mane? Have ye had recourse to the dirthy expadient of getting constables to come for-ar-rd to spile the purtiest little affair that was ever to come off on a misty mornin'?"

"It don't mean nothink of the kind, Captain," said Mr. Mac Grab gruffly: then, as with a side glance he convinced himself that his follower Proggis was now only a few paces distant in the rear of the warlike Irishman, he continued thus:—"The fact is, I'm a hofferer—and you're my prisoner."

"An officer-r-r!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss, his countenance becoming actually purple with rage, while Frank Curtis, suddenly assured that all prospects of a duel were at an end, began to enjoy the scene amazingly.

"Yes, sir—this person is an officer," said Mr. Howard, in the calmest manner possible; "and I am the attorney for the plaintiff—Mr. Spriggins—at whose suit you are now captured for three hundred and forty-seven pounds, including costs."

"Blood and thunther-r!" roared Captain O'Blunderbuss, swelling so tremendously with passion that he seemed as if about to burst through his military frock-coat with its frogs and braidings: "this is a rare insult not ounly to me, but also to ould Ireland. Mor-r-thaunt, my boy—"

"It's a very awkward business, Captain," said the gentleman thus appealed to. "But I do not see why it should prevent the business on which we met. Pistols first—prison afterwards."

"That won't do," said Mr. Mac Grab.

"Not a bit," growled Proggis, who was now stationed close behind the Captain.

"Bastes of the ear-rth!" roared O'Blunderbuss: "do—"

"Come now—enough of this gammon," interrupted Mac Grab. "If you won't walk quiet off with us, we must see what force will do."

"It is no use to resist, my boy," whispered Mordaunt to his friend, who was literally foaming at the mouth. "But we will find another occasion to punish these cowardly fellows," he added aloud, casting fiery glances upon the lawyer and Frank Curtis.

"Be Jasus! and I'll have some of it out of 'em now!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss; and springing upon the unfortunate Frank, he administered to this young gentleman three or four hearty cuffs, before a hand could be stretched out to withhold him.

Curtis roared and wriggled about with the pain; but he was speedily released from the effects of this onslaught, Mac Grab, Proggis, and the lawyer, hastening to his assistance.

The warlike Captain was then borne away to the hackney-coach, in which he was safely deposited, Mordaunt obtaining leave from Mr. Howard to accompany his friend in the same vehicle as far as the prison to which he was to be consigned.

Frank Curtis declined forming one of the party; and while the coach proceeded in as direct a line as possible for Horsemonger Lane gaol, the young gentleman sped merrily along alone and on foot, delighted, in spite of the drubbing which he had received, to think that the redoubtable Captain O'Blunderbuss was on his way to a place where his warlike propensities stood every chance of being "cribb'd, cabin'd, and confin'd," at least for a season.

You may conceive, gentle reader, that Captain O'Blunderbuss was in a dreadful rage at being interrupted in the midst of his favourite pursuit—especially as the

interruption was of so unpleasant a nature as that described. But his vapouring and blustering produced little effect upon Messrs. Mac Grab and Progg, who never spoke a word during the journey from Battersea Fields to Horsemonger Lane, save to answer in an affirmative when Mr. Howard proposed that they should stop at a public-house for a few moments to partake of some refreshment; and then they each responded—"Yes—rum, please."

The Captain himself was accommodated with a glass of whiskey: Mordaunt and the lawyer took nothing.

The vehicle then proceeded, without stopping, to the prison, where the gallant Captain—oh! most ignominious fate!—was handed over to the care of the turnkeys in the debtors' department of the establishment.

CHAPTER LXIV

OLD DEATH AND HIS FRIEND TIDMARSH.

THE incident which occupied the preceding chapter occurred, as will probably be recollected, on the morning of the Wednesday after the Monday on which Thomas Rainford was hanged and resuscitated.

It was on the evening of the same Wednesday, and at about eight o'clock, that we must again introduce the reader to the laboratory in Red Lion Street.

A cheerful fire burnt in the grate; and before it sat Dr. Lascelles and the Earl of Ellingham, engaged in conversation and also in the discussion of a very excellent bottle of claret conveyed thither from the Earl's own cellar in Pall Mall.

"I wish Jacob Smith would return," said the young nobleman, looking anxiously and nervously at his watch.

"In the same manner have you renewed the conversation after every pause that has occurred during the last two hours," observed the physician. "My dear Arthur, there is nothing like patience in this world. You may depend upon it, all goes on well—or you would too soon have received the tidings of any evil that might have occurred. Bad news fly uncommonly fast."

"I wish that I possessed a small amount of your calm and unexcitable temperament, doctor," returned the Earl. "But I am so fearful lest any untoward accident should mar the success—the complete success of all our plans."

"Do not meet evils half way," said the doctor. "Every thing has gone on well as yet. Mr. de Medina acted with the despatch of a regular man of business. No one could possibly have managed better. He left on Monday evening for Dover, where he remained but just long enough yesterday morning to hire a cutter and arrange with the captain to have her in readiness to leave at a moment's warning. He was back in London again last night by seven; and fortunately your half-brother was so far recovered as to be able to depart in company with Jacob. The disguise you procured for him was impenetrable to even the eyes of the most experienced Bow Street runner. He and his young companion reached Dover early this morning; and I dare swear that long before this hour gallant Tom is safe in Calais, where Mr. de Medina and his daughters will also be some time to-morrow. Then off they all go to Paris, where you are to rejoin them."

"Yes: all has been well arranged by Mr. de Medina," said the Earl; "and I have no doubt that the results will be as you anticipate. But I charged Jacob to re-

turn post-haste to London—I begged him not to spare the gold with which I furnished him, so that he might be back here as soon as possible to assure us of my brother's safe embarkation for France. And yet the lad is not with us yet! You must admit, doctor, that I am not to be blamed for my apprehensions: for misadventures and obstacles, altogether unforeseen—never dreamt of, indeed—do start up so suddenly, that I confess I shall enjoy no peace of mind until I receive from Jacob's own lips the assurance that the object of my anxiety is beyond the reach of all danger."

"How can it be otherwise than that he is already safe?" demanded the physician somewhat impatiently.

"Who can tell what may happen?" asked the Earl. "On Monday night, while Thomas was sleeping and profound tranquillity as well as perfect security seemed to prevail in the house, was not the grand secret suddenly menaced by the appearance of one whom only a few hours previously I had been led to consider numbered with the dead? Yet doubtless you thought at the moment, while at your house in Grafton Street, that all was calm and unendangered in Red Lion Street."

"The sudden turning up of that old scoundrel whom Thomas Rainford supposed to be dead, and of whom you have since told me so much, was certainly very remarkable," observed the physician. "But you certainly managed the matter most cleverly—the more so, too, inasmuch as my patient knew nothing of the transaction until it was all over."

"Fortunately he slept, as I have already told you," said the Earl. "That excellent lad Jacob was for a few minutes completely overcome—stunned—stupified, indeed, when he recognized the countenance of Benjamin Bones; and I myself was strangely excited when those terrible words, '*It is Old Death!*' fell upon my ears—for I knew to whom they applied. Moreover, Jacob let the lamp fall; and I dared not move to obtain another light—for Bones began to struggle furiously. I was sadly alarmed lest my half-brother should awake: but fortunately his slumber was profound."

"And then, I believe, Jacob Smith recovered himself and procured another light?" said the physician interrogatively.

"You see, doctor," returned the Earl, with a smile, "that you did not listen very attentively to my narrative of the transaction, when you came back to the house yesterday morning."

"Because, I remember, you would persist in telling me the story at a time when I was thinking of the best restoratives for my patient," answered Lascelles, also with a good-natured laugh. "But pray give me all the details now—and the occupation will while away the time until Jacob makes his appearance."

"God grant that he may soon come!" exclaimed the Earl. "But let me resume at the point where we interrupted ourselves."

"I asked you if Jacob did not procure another light the moment he had recovered his presence of mind," said the physician: "but I remember now that you availed yourself of the opportunity afforded by the darkness, to drag the old man back to the staircase leading into the subterranean, and that the terrible menaces you whispered in his ears reduced him to the passiveness of a lamb. He is a hideous-looking man—for, after all you learnt from your brother concerning him, it is clear that he is the same whom I had seen in this house on one or two occasions, but whose name I did not then know."

"He is clearly the same person," said the Earl.

"Well—and so you got him down the break-neck

stairs," added the doctor; "and then it was you called to Jacob to procure another light, Rainford continuing asleep the whole time. But, after all that had taken place in the morning, his slumber would necessarily be heavy."

"I can assure you that a more dangerous task I had seldom undertaken than that of dragging the old villain down those stairs," said the Earl; "and how it was that we both escaped broken necks, I am at a loss to divine. However, I did get him safely down to the bottom; and the great door being then bolted only on the same side as the stairs, I had no difficulty in opening it. Jacob came down with the light; and I compelled the old man to rise, and enter the subterranean with me."

"I will be bound his hideous countenance was convulsed with rage and alarm?" exclaimed the doctor. "But I must get a cast of his head when he dies—which I dare say will be upon the scaffold."

"Yes: he was positively horrible with mingled wrath and fear," continued the Earl. "But I had no pity for him—as I have none now. I made him walk a few paces in front of me, Jacob accompanying us with the light. Once he turned round, and fixed on the lad a look so full of infernal spite—of demon-like malignity, that I was horrified to think that such hateful emotions could find an abode in the breast of any human being. Jacob Smith recoiled in affright—as if from the glare of a serpent's eyes; but I whispered a word to reassure him—and almost at the same moment I beheld, by the light of the lamp, a door in the side of the subterranean. You know the suspicions which had already filled my mind: they then returned with renewed vigour to my memory—and I felt convinced that I touched on the threshold of a discovery. I commanded the old man to stop—suffering him to believe that I had pistols about me, and should not hesitate to use them in case of need. The door was speedily opened—"

"And it led into the very dungeon where you were confined for four weeks," said Dr. Lascelles. "The villains—the scoundrels, who perpetrated such an outrage!"

"Yes—it was the very same dungeon," continued the Earl; "and my blood ran cold as I glanced within. Jacob Smith understood the discovery that I had made, and uttered an ejaculation of horror. '*I now know at least one of the authors of my imprisonment*.' I said, turning to Old Death, whose eyes were again glaring fiercely upon the lad. '*But,*' I added, '*this is no time for question and answer on that head.*'—Then, taking the lamp, I held it in such a manner as to be able to throw its light upon that part of the cell where I had opened to myself the means of escape; and I perceived that the masonry had not been replaced. I accordingly resolved not to imprison the old man there: and yet, what could I do with him? Turning round to examine more minutely the nature of the place, I beheld another door, on the opposite side of the subterranean. Old Death marked the fact of my eyes lingering thereon; and he gave vent to something between a menace and a prayer.—'*I seek not to harm you,*' was my reply; '*but as it once suited your purposes that I should become a captive here for a few weeks, it is now expedient according to my views that you should become a prisoner for a few days. In with you, old man!*' I added, having in the meantime opened the door of this second cell!"

"And there the old reprobate is now cooped up, along with his friend Tidmarsh," exclaimed the phy-

sician, laughing at the idea of the two cronies being caught in one of their own snares;—for that they were companions in iniquity he had now but little doubt.

"You must admit that the case was a desperate and an urgent one," continued the Earl. "From all you had told me concerning this Tidmarsh, I felt well persuaded that he was likely to visit the subterranean; and I knew that, were such a casualty to ensue, Old Death had merely to raise his voice in order to obtain his release."

"And so you quit the subterranean and run round to Turnmill Street to tell old Tidmarsh that Dr. Lascelles wishes to see him immediately in his laboratory?" exclaimed the doctor, again laughing heartily—for the entire affair seemed to have touched a long slumbering chord of merry humour in his breast.

"Precisely so," returned the young nobleman. "Tidmarsh, however, eyed me very suspiciously, and muttered something to himself about the doctor being very indiscreet;—but I affected not to notice his peculiarity of manner. He came round to the house—and you know the rest."

"Yes: you took him down to join his friend Old Death, as it seems the rascal is called," observed the doctor.

"And there they must remain until Jacob Smith shall have returned with the tidings of my brother's safe embarkation," continued the Earl. "It is true that they are both utterly ignorant of his escape from death—his extraordinary resuscitation, thanks to your profound knowledge and generous aid, doctor;—but, as we have every reason to believe at least one of them to be Thomas's enemy, they shall neither obtain a chance of discovering the secret of his *new existence*, as I may indeed term it,—at all events not until he shall be beyond the reach of danger. And, do you know, it strikes me most forcibly that Tidmarsh was the gaoler who attended upon me during my incarceration in the dungeon below? Although the person who *was* my gaoler, invariably spoke in a feigned tone, and as lacrimally as possible, yet I am almost certain that it was the voice of Tidmarsh. Moreover, he seemed for a moment so astounded—so struck, when I presented myself at the door of his dwelling in Turnmill Street, to deliver the forged message which induced him to accompany me round to this house, that I am convinced he knew me. For, though he never permitted me to catch a glimpse of his countenance, when he used to visit me at the trap in the dungeon-door—still he might have seen my face. However, when I presented myself at his abode in the way which I have described, my manner appeared so off-hand and sincere, that had any suspicions of treachery entered his mind, they were dispelled almost immediately. But, doctor, I abominate the necessity of having to use duplicity even towards villains of that stamp!"

"Your compunction is carried too far, my dear Arthur," returned Lascelles. "It was necessary to get that scoundrel Tidmarsh into such a snare, as to place him beyond the possibility of doing mischief; and, though the narrative which you have now given me more in detail than you did yesterday morning, when you hastily sketched these incidents to your brother and myself,—though, I say, it makes me laugh—a habit not frequent with me—I really commend your foresight in averting danger, as well as your bravery in carrying into effect the requisite precautions."

"I deserve and require no praise, doctor," answered the Earl. "What would I not have done to ensure the safety of him who has behaved so generously to me?"

During the whole of Monday night, I sat by his bedside, anxiously awaiting the moment when slumber should leave his heavy eye-lids; for I knew that I had welcome—most welcome tidings for his ears. But he slept on until you came: and then, doctor, you were a witness of the joy which he experienced on learning that he had not been the cause of the death of Benjamin Bones—miscreant though the man be!”

Scarcely were these words uttered, when a low but hasty knock at the front door caused Lord Ellingham to spring from his seat—seize the lamp—and hasten to answer the summons.

Dr. Lascelles could hear the Earl ejaculate the words—“Jacob Smith!”—then a hurried whisper took place in the hall;—and, in another moment, the joyous exclamation—“Thank God! thank God!”—bursting from the young nobleman’s lips, met the physician’s ears.

And Dr. Lascelles thereby knew that Rainford had succeeded in quitting the shores of England in safety!

CHAPTER LXV.

THE EXAMINATION.

THE reader will remember that, according to the arrangements originally chalked out, Lord Ellingham and Jacob Smith were to have accompanied Tom Rain to France. But this project was disturbed by the appearance of Old Death in the house in Red Lion Street, and the incidents to which it gave rise, as narrated in the last chapter.

For, the Earl—having succeeded in making Old Death and Tidmarsh his prisoners—resolved to remain in the house, not only that he might, by means of frequent visits to the subterranean, guard against their escape, but also to supply them with food and to liberate them when circumstances should render their farther confinement unnecessary.

Thus was it that Tom Rain and Jacob had proceeded without the Earl to Dover, and that the lad had returned thence to London the moment he had seen Rainford safe on board the cutter which Mr. de Medina had hired especially to convey him to France. Nay—Jacob was not content with merely witnessing the embarkation of the individual to whom he had become so deeply attached; but, in spite of the instructions he had received alike from the Earl and Tom Rain himself to return with the least possible delay to the metropolis, he had lingered on the pier at Dover until the white sails of the cutter were no longer in sight.

He therefore arrived somewhat later in London than had been expected, although he travelled post and spared not the gold placed at his disposal to urge the postillions on: but when he frankly admitted to Lord Ellingham and the doctor the reason of his retarded appearance in Red Lion Street, they could not find it in their hearts to utter a word of reproach or blame.

No:—for Lord Ellingham’s joy was now as exuberant as his apprehensions had a short time previously been strong and oppressive; and he wrung the hand of the humble Jacob as if that lad had been his own brother!

“We will presently liberate our prisoners,” said the Earl, when Jacob had related the particulars of his journey with Rainford to Dover, and of the latter’s safe embarkation. “But, before I suffer them to go at large, it behoves me not only to adopt the means requisite to elicit certain explanations interesting to myself, but also to take those steps that will effectually prevent the mysterious subterraneans and dungeons of this es-

tablishment—or rather, of the *two* houses—from being accessible or available to the miscreants whom we are about to set free. Conceiving that Jacob would be sure to come back this evening, and intending that his return should be followed by the examination and liberation of those two men, I have ordered the three faithful domestics who assisted us so materially on Monday morning, and on whose fidelity I can rely with so much confidence, to be here at half-past nine o’clock.”

“For what purpose?” demanded the physician, in astonishment.

“To increase our number so as to overawe the wretches who are to appear before us,” replied the Earl. “It is not that I fear to give them an inch of vantage-ground; but were they to find themselves in the presence of only two men and this lad, they might attempt resistance, and use a violence that would alarm the neighbourhood;—and I need hardly say, doctor, how necessary it is for all our sakes that we should not be placed in a position which would compel us to give to a magistrate any explanation of the modes in which we severally became acquainted with this establishment or those two vile men.”

“Your precautions are most admirably forecast, my dear Earl,” responded Dr. Lascelles. “Hark! there is a single knock at the front door!”

“Run, Jacob, my boy,” said the Earl: “my servants have arrived.”

The lad left the room without taking a light: but the young nobleman almost immediately rose and followed him—a second thought suggesting the prudence of assuring himself against the coming of any unwelcome intruder instead of his servants.

By the time the Earl reached the middle of the stairs leading down into the hall, Jacob had opened the street-door.

“Mrs. Bunce!” exclaimed the lad, starting back half in affright, as he recognised her wizen countenance by the feeble light that streamed from an adjacent window.

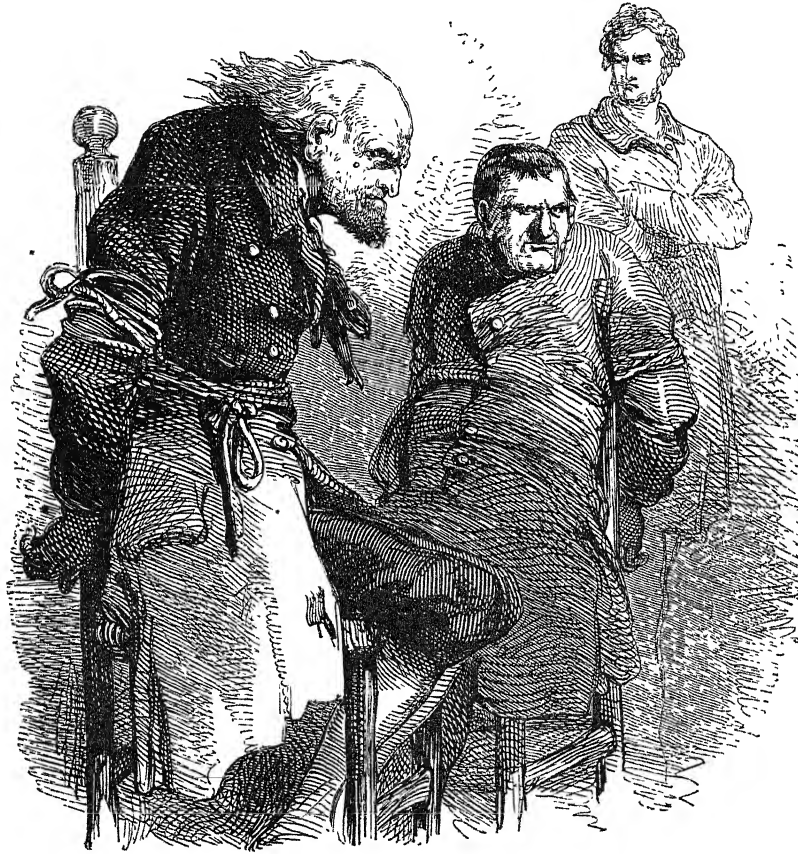
“What! Jacob—you here!” cried the woman. “Why—how come you in this house? and what have you been doing with yourself lately? I began to think you was playing us false: but now that I find you here, I suppose you know all about the trick of Mr. Bones’s pretended death, and have made every thing right with him. But is he here?”

“Yes,” answered Jacob boldly—for he had by this time recovered his presence of mind. “Walk in:—he wants very much to see you.”

“And so do I want to see him,” added Mrs. Bunce as she entered the hall, while Jacob barred the door carefully. “I have n’t seen him ever since Monday night; and he was to be sure and come up to the Dials last evening. So I got alarmed, and come down to see, I went to Turnmill Street—but I could make no one hear there—for I suppose you know by this time all about Tidmarsh and the other crib—”

“Yes—and the subterranean too,” added Jacob: “all the secrets, so long kept from me, are now revealed. But walk up, Mrs. Bunce—walk up.”

The woman, suspecting nothing wrong, and not altogether displeased to find (as she believed that Jacob had risen so high in favour with Old Death as to become one of his confidants,—the woman, we say, walked up the staircase, which was well known to her; but, scarcely had she reached the first turn, when she was suddenly grasped by a vigorous hand, and a voice exclaimed, “Make no noise, Mrs. Bunce—or it will be the worse for you.”



"Thank God, you are there, my lord!" cried Jacob now hastily running up the stairs. "This woman is one of the gang which it has fallen to your lordship's lot to disperse."

"Oh! Jacob," ejaculated Mrs. Bunce, "you don't know what you are doing! But who is this lord—and what have I done to injure him?"

"I am the Earl of Ellingham, woman," said Arthur; "and perhaps you are not ignorant of the long imprisonment which I endured in this place. But proceed—I will follow you: and remember that you are in the power of those who will not suffer you to escape."

At that instant there was another knock at the door.

"Remain here," said the nobleman to Mrs. Bunce. "Jacob, let me answer that summons."

Arthur accordingly proceeded to the door, and gave admittance to his three men-servants.

They then all repaired to the laboratory together, where the Earl made Dr. Lascelles acquainted, in a hasty whisper, with the cause of Mrs. Bunce's appearance on the stage of their present proceedings.

The moment the woman emerged from the darkness of the landing outside to the light of the labora-

tory, she cast a hasty and inquiring glance around at those present; but her eyes settled on Jacob Smith, and she was evidently much astonished to see him dressed in a plain but most respectable manner, and looking neat, clean, and even interesting in his appearance. For the lad possessed good features—very bright eyes—and a set of white, even teeth; and though his countenance was still somewhat indicative of a sickly constitution, it nevertheless showed a state of health considerably improved by the excitement of travelling and by the happiness imparted to his soul by the successful escape of Thomas Rainford.

Jacob saw that Mrs. Bunce surveyed him with interest; and at the moment he felt pity for the woman who had on many occasions shown him some kindness, and towards whom he had also experienced at times unaccountable heart-yearnings;—but he could not blame himself for having just now entrapped her into the power of Lord Ellingham, because he knew how important it was to assemble in the presence of that nobleman as many of Old Death's accomplices as possible. Besides, he was well aware that no harm was intended her; and this assurance he conveyed to her in a hasty whisper—though not in such a way as to in-

duce her to believe that he was any longer an accomplice also.

"You will now accompany me *below*," said the Earl, addressing himself to his three servants.

Jacob hastened to light another lamp (of which there were several in the laboratory); and the Earl, attended by his domestics, proceeded into the adjoining bed-room; whence they passed down into the subterranean.

Dr. Lascelles, Mrs. Bunce, and Jacob were left together in the laboratory.

"What does all this mean?" demanded the woman, accosting the lad in an imploring manner—for she was afraid, in spite of the whispered assurance she had received from him.

"I cannot give you any explanation," answered Jacob aloud. "But I may go so far as to promise you—and this good gentleman," he added, turning towards the doctor, "will confirm my words—that no harm is intended to you, provided you give faithful replies to the questions that will be put to you presently."

"The lad speaks quite properly, woman," said the physician; "and you had better hold your tongue until *the prisoners* make their appearance."

"The prisoners!" muttered Mrs. Bunce; and it struck her that allusion must be made to Old Death and Tidmarsh.

Nor was she mistaken; for, in a few minutes, the Earl and his domestics reappeared, escorting into the laboratory those two individuals, whose hands were fastened by strong cords.

Benjamin Bones looked more hideous than ever. A white bristling beard, of three or four days' growth gave an additional death-like aspect to his countenance; and his eyes glared, from beneath their shaggy brows, with mingled rage and alarm.

Tidmarsh manifested less emotion; but, on entering the laboratory, he cast a rapid and scrutinizing glance around, as if to ascertain who were present.

Old Death did the same; and when his eyes caught sight of Jacob Smith, his forehead contracted into a thousand wrinkles with the intense ferocity of his malignant hate: then he exchanged a rapid glance with Mrs. Bunce, who gave him to understand, by a peculiarly significant look, that she was not there as a witness against him, but as a prisoner herself.

Dr. Lascelles stood with his back to the fire, contemplating the various persons assembled, in a manner which showed that he was far from being an uninterested spectator of the proceedings; indeed, he not only prepared to listen with attention to all that was about to be said, on account of the friendly feelings which he experienced towards the Earl of Ellingham,—but he likewise occupied himself in studying the physiognomies of Old Death, Tidmarsh, and Mrs. Bunce—a survey which led him to the comfortable conclusion that if they did not all three perish on the scaffold sooner or later, it would not be their own fault.

Lord Ellingham ordered the three prisoners to be accommodated with chairs; and, when they were seated, he addressed them in the following manner:—

"You are now in the presence of one who has the power to punish you for your numerous misdeeds, and who, should you refuse to answer the questions to be put to you, will not hesitate to hand you all three over into the grasp of justice. The

individual who possesses that power, and who is now about to question you, is myself. All your secrets are known or suspected—and, even should you refuse to answer my queries, or if you reply to them falsely, I have the means of arriving at the truth. To you, Benjamin Bones, do I address myself first:—answer me, then—and say wherefore your agents or accomplices waylaid me, and bore me off to that dungeon opening from the subterranean. Speak, villain—and see that you speak truly!"

"One word, my lord," said the arch-miscreant, his sepulchral tones quivering and tremulous with mingled rage and alarm: "let me say one word to you in private!"

"Not a syllable! Speak openly—and cause not idle delay," exclaimed the young nobleman.

"Do you know," asked Old Death, "that it is in my power to publish a secret which would not redound to your honour?"

"I can well divine to what you would allude," returned Arthur; "and I despise your menace. Go and say, if thou wilt, that the Earl of Ellingham is the half-brother of him——"

"Who was hanged on Monday morning!" growled Old Death; and then he chuckled horribly in the depth of his malignity. "Ha! ha! ha! the proud and wealthy Earl of Ellingham the brother of a highwayman who was hanged,—and that brother, too, the elder one, and born in lawful wedlock! Ah! this would be a pretty tale to circulate at the West End!"

"Scoundrel! you cannot provoke me to anger," said the Earl, calmly; "but you may move me to invoke the aid of justice to punish you for daring to imprison me during four long weeks in a noisome dungeon—a crime for which the penalty would be transportation for the remainder of your miserable life. Moreover, that same justice would require of you full and ample explanations respecting those rooms filled with property of immense value, and of such a miscellaneous nature that the various articles could not have been honestly obtained! Ah! you shrink—you recoil from that menace! Think you that any ridiculous punctilio has prevented me from forcing the locks of those rooms and examining their contents? No: the day after you became *my* prisoner here, and when I ascertained beyond all doubt that you were the tenant of those rooms, I hesitated not to visit them, to glean evidence against you. Now, old man, you see that you are in my power; and you will do well not to push my patience beyond the sphere of indulgence."

"And what if I tell you all you want to know?" said Benjamin Bones, appalled by the unveiling of the fearful precipice on which he stood.

"Give me the fullest and completest explanation of many circumstances in the unravelling of which I feel a special interest—spare me the trouble of adopting other means to obtain the solution of those mysteries to which I possess a clue," exclaimed the Earl; "and I shall forthwith liberate you and your companions, having previously taken measures to prevent you from holding any farther interest in this house or the tenement in Turnmill Street, with which the subterranean passage communicates."

"And—and my property?" gasped Old Death.

"To allow you to retain it, were a sin," answered

the Earl emphatically: "to give it up to the magisterial authorities, or to dispose of it for the benefit of the poor, would be to court an inquiry which must inevitably lead to the mention of your name and the consequent apprehension of your person—a result which would be an indirect forfeiture of the promise I have given and now repeat: namely, to permit yourself and companions to depart with impunity on condition that you make a full and complete confession in regard to all the points wherein I am interested. What, then, can be done with that property?" exclaimed the nobleman: "there is but one course to pursue—and that is, to *destroy it!*"

"Destroy it!—destroy it!" groaned Old Death, writhing with mental anguish on his chair: "what? destroy all that hard-earned wealth—those treasures—"

"Every article!" interrupted the nobleman emphatically; "and consider yourself fortunate in quitting this house to breathe the air of liberty, rather than to be consigned to a gaol."

"Oh! my God! my God!" cried Old Death, reduced to despair by the lamentable prospect now placed before him.

"Blaspheme not, villain!—invoke not the sacred name of the Almighty!" ejaculated Arthur. "Rather implore pardon for your manifold iniquities!"

"It would take a long life of repentance to purge his soul of all the atrocity that harbours in it," observed the physician, who had intently watched all the variations of the old man's countenance during this colloquy.

"My dear doctor," said the Earl, "there is hope for even those who are most deeply stained with sin—yes, even for this miserable man, who would sooner cling to his ill-got wealth than adopt the only means now open to him of avoiding the grasp of justice. But it is useless to prolong this discussion. Benjamin Bones! once for all, do you consent to make a full confession, as the first atonement for a life of crime, and to surrender all your treasures as the second?—or shall I send forthwith to summon hither the officers of justice?"

"But, if you take mine all, you send me forth into the world a beggar!" cried Old Death, in a tone which seemed to indicate that he was about to weep for very rage.

"On that night," said the Earl solemnly, and almost sternly, "when Thomas Rainford took from thy treasury the money which he conceived to be his due, did he not leave ample sums behind? and wilt thou tell me that thou hast not since disposed of those sums in other places of security? Thou seest, villain, that I can read all thy secrets: so prate no more about being reduced to beggary."

Old Death's eyes fell beneath the fixed gaze of the Earl of Ellingham, who thereby perceived that the conjecture which he had just hazarded was indeed the right one.

"And you will let us go free if I answer all your questions?" said the arch-miscreant, after a brief pause, during which he consulted his companions in inquiry by means of a rapid interchange of glances.

"I will," replied the nobleman emphatically.

"But what if I should tell you more than you already seem to suspect—through ignorance of the precise extent of your real knowledge," said Old Death,—"and thus make you acquainted with things likely to render you vindictive—"

"I scorn a mean and petty vengeance!" ex-

claimed the young nobleman. "My word is pledged to a certain condition; and that promise shall be redeemed, whatever the nature of your revelations may be."

"Then I consent!" exclaimed Old Death. "Bear witness, Dr. Lascelles—for you are an honourable man—"

"The Earl of Ellingham is too lenient," interrupted the physician. "But, as it is, I guarantee my word of honour that his lordship will faithfully fulfil his promise."

"In spite of any thing that may transpire, and for which he may not be prepared?" added Old Death, determined to drive as sure a bargain as possible: "because," he continued, "it is quite impossible for me to foresee the nature of the questions you are going to put to me, my lord—and, in answering them, I may only commit myself. I am in your power; but pray use that power mercifully."

"Mercifully!" cried the Earl, in a tone of mingled scorn and disgust. "I have no sympathy with you of any kind, old man—you are loathsome to me! I merely make a compact with you—and that bargain shall be adhered to on my part, if it be fulfilled on yours. I however warn you, that should I detect you in aught at variance with the truth, our compact ceases—my promise is annulled—and you remain at my disposal as completely as if no pledge relative to your safety had ever issued from my lips. Weigh well, then, the position in which you stand," continued the young nobleman sternly: "for I am not to be trifled with!"

"I will tell you all you require to know—all—alt," responded Old Death, gasping convulsively: "only let this scene end as soon as possible—for it does me harm."

"We will proceed at once to business," said the Earl: then seating himself in front of the prisoners, he addressed his questions to Old Death, saying, "In the first place, why was I imprisoned in the subterranean dungeon?"

"To prevent you from using your wealth to bribe the gaol-authorities to let Rainford escape, or your interest to save him if he was condemned," answered Old Death, in a slow and measured tone.

"Then, villain that you are," cried the Earl, scarcely able to subdue his resentment, "you had an interest in hurrying the son of your own half-sister Octavia to the scaffold!—Oh! I understand it all! Thomas felt assured that some profound, secret, and malign influence was at work against him; for those who were put forward as the prosecutors—the knight and his nephew—went as unwilling witnesses! Then it was you," continued the nobleman, in a tone of fearful excitement,—"it was *you* whose gold doubtless bribed the attorney Howard to institute those fatal proceedings!"

"It was—it was!" ejaculated Old Death, trembling from head to foot. "But Rainford deserved it;—he outraged me—I was good and kind to him—I threw excellent things in his way—but he made me bring him to this house—he learnt all my secrets;—he robbed me of my treasures—he carried off my private papers—"

"Silence!" exclaimed the Earl, in a tone which made the arch-villain and his fellow-prisoners all three start convulsively: "give not a false colouring to that transaction! Rainford learnt, when in the country, who you were and how nearly you were allied to his late mother;—he knew also how you

had plundered him of his inheritance—and he was justified in the conduct he pursued towards you. The money which he took was legitimately his own, allowing for the accumulation of interest and compound interest; and the papers were not *yours*—but rightfully his property!”

“Then why did he not tell me who he was?—why did he entrap me, and compel me at the muzzle of the levelled pistol to conduct him to my secret places?” demanded Old Death impatiently.

“Your villany and your craft could only be met by stratagem and counterplot,” returned the Earl emphatically; “and in that way did Rainford meet you. And yet—for the truth of my assertion you cannot deny—you have sent your own nephew to the scaffold!”

“It was his own fault!” persisted Old Death doggedly. “He should not have crossed my path—he should not have proclaimed warfare against me. I would have been his friend——”

“His friend!” exclaimed the Earl, in a tone of bitter scorn.

“Yes—his friend, after his own fashion—in the way he wanted a friend!” continued Old Death, becoming garrulous with nervous excitement. “But he outraged me in a way I could not forgive nor forget—he penetrated into all my secrets—he might have returned and helped himself again and again from my stores—he *knew too much* for me to be safe—and moreover he bound me to a chair in such a way that I fell into a fit, and should have died had it not been for this man here,” added the miscreant, indicating Tidmarsh. “All those things combined to render Rainford’s death necessary—and he has paid the penalty of his conduct towards me.”

Lord Ellingham recoiled in horror from the fiend-like man who could thus seek to palliate the foul deed of having sent his own relative to the scaffold, through no moral motives, but merely to gratify his vengeance and remove one who seemed to be dangerous in his path.

“Let us know more of the sham-death business on your part, Mr. Bones—or whatever your name is,” said Dr. Lascelles.

“You remember that night I came round to the house here and met you, sir?” hastily exclaimed Tidmarsh, thinking that he should serve himself by exhibiting a readiness to volunteer any explanation that was required. “Well—you recollect that it was the night you saw Rainford in your laboratory, and we knew that he had gone down into the subterranean. Then, if you please to remember, we went away together—and I took leave of you at the corner of Turnmill Street. But I suspected there was something wrong—although I did not dare offer to go into Mr. Bones’s rooms while you were with me. As soon as you had left me, however, I returned to the house—not by the subterranean, be it well understood,—and passing through your laboratory——”

“Then you possess counterpart keys, rascal!” exclaimed the physician angrily. “But go on.”

“Well, sir—I passed through your laboratory into the bed-room there, locking the door of communication after me. Then I entered the first store-room; but I had scarcely put foot therein when I heard a violent noise as if some one was trying to break through the trap-door in the bed-chamber. I confess that I was frightened—because I knew it must be Rainford, and I suspected him to

be a desperate man who meant no good in that house. I remained quite still—heard him break open the trap and come forth. I also heard him dash open the door of your laboratory, through which he passed; but as I had neglected to lock the other door there—leading to the landing—he was not compelled to force that also. Well—I waited a few minutes, till I thought he had left the house; and then, having great misgivings on account of Mr. Bones, I went into the next store-room. But there I caught a glimpse of Rainford, standing over Mr. Bones, who was tied in his chair. I was about to retreat, I must confess—but Rainford bolted away like a ghost; and I ran up to my friend, who I thought was dead. I however saw enough, at a second glance, to convince me that he was only in a kind of trance-like fit; and in a short time I recovered him. That’s my part of the story, sir; and, I hope——”

“Enough!” exclaimed Lord Ellingham abruptly. “I have now a question to ask you, Mr. Tidmarsh:—Were you not my gaoler when I was a prisoner in the subterranean?”

“Well, my lord—it’s no use denying it,” answered the man; “but——”

“Spare your comments. I cannot complain of the way in which you executed a task doubtless imposed on you by your master here. Moreover, you even showed me some indulgence, by permitting me to write those letters to my friends——”

“Give my friend Bones his due, my lord,” interrupted Tidmarsh; “for I showed ‘em to him first before I posted them.”

“And as they could do no harm, I let them go,” hastily exclaimed Old Death; “for I did not want to punish *you* more than I could help. Besides, I was glad you wrote them;—in the first place because they prevented any noise amongst your friends on account of your disappearance—and, secondly, because the one you wrote to Rainford was enough to convince him he had nothing more to hope from you.”

“Even while you seek to conciliate me, you cannot prevent the manifestation of your fiendish hate against him who was the son of your sister Octavia!” said the Earl, gazing upon Old Death in profound surprise,—surprise that his heart could be so irredeemably black. “But now answer me another question,” he continued after a few moments’ pause: “how came you to know that I was likely to use my interest or my gold on behalf of Thomas Rainford?”

“My spies were stationed about Horsemonger Lane gaol,” answered Old Death; “and I had a lodging in the immediate neighbourhood. They came and told me that you had just gone into the prison to see Rainford; and I concluded that you must already be aware of the relationship which existed between you. To resolve and to act with me are the same thing; and I sent back my men to seize you and convey you to the subterranean.”

“And why had you stationed spies about the gaol?” demanded the Earl.

“Because I suspected that Rainford would send for you, or that you would go to him of your own accord,” replied Old Death; “for he had taken from me the papers which *proved* who he was—and I supposed that his first act on possessing them, must have been to communicate with you; and in that I cannot have been far wrong.”

By dint of questioning and cross-questioning, the following additional facts were elicited;—

When Tidmarsh recovered Old Death from the species of trance or fit into which he had fallen when bound to the chair, the latter determined to encompass at least the transportation, if not the execution, of Tom Rain. For two or three days he remained quiet at Tidmarsh's abode in Turnmill Street, brooding over his scheme of vengeance, and communicating with none of his friends elsewhere—not even with the Bunces. In planning the punishment of Tom Rain, Old Death knew that he had a most delicate and difficult game to play; for the highwayman was to be sacrificed to his hatred and his interests—and yet in such a manner that the victim should not know by whom the blow was struck nor the source whence his ruin came. The deed must be effected with so much dark mystery that Rainford should not even have any ground for supposing that Bones was the real prime mover of the prosecution; and in this case the arch-villain felt convinced that Rainford would not even mention his name nor allude to his establishments in Clerkenwell, when placed before the magistrate or on his trial. The affair of Sir Christopher Blunt's three thousand pounds seemed the best point on which to set the whole of this complicated machinery in motion; and Old Death knew sufficient of Mr. Howard's cold, calculating, and money-making disposition to be well aware that his aid in the business could be readily secured. He communicated all his plans to Tidmarsh; and this latter individual suggested that Rainford should be led to believe that Old Death was no more. "For," said Tidmarsh, "when I entered your store-room and saw Rainford gazing at you in your fit, I concluded you were really dead, and I am certain that such was the impression of the highwayman. Besides, he fled in horror; and Rainford is not the person thus to act save under extraordinary circumstances." This hint was adopted; and it was resolved that Rainford should be induced to suppose that Benjamin Bones was positively defunct—a belief that would of course preclude the possibility of any suspicion that the said Bones was the individual who set in motion the springs of that conspiracy which was to carry the victim to the scaffold. These projects being all settled between Old Death and his man Tidmarsh, the latter was despatched to Mrs. Bunce to whom the entire scheme was communicated. She was instructed to set spies to watch Tom Rain, and to convey to him, if possible, the information that Benjamin Bones was dead. It was also determined not to trust Jacob Smith with the plan of vengeance to be carried out, but, as a precaution on the right side, to let even him also believe that Old Death was no more. At the same time the lad was to be used as a spy on Rainford, his devotion to whom was not of course suspected. When Mrs. Bunce met, or rather overtook Rainford in Gray's-Inn-Lane on the Saturday night previous to his arrest, it was really by accident; and she availed herself of that opportunity to inform him that Old Death had gone to his last account, according to the instructions communicated to her in the morning of that very day. She endeavoured to watch whither Rainford went, after she parted from him; but he disappeared, and she concluded that he had entered some house in that vicinity. That he had quitted Lock's Fields was known to her; and she therefore imagined that his new domicile must be in the Lane. Jacob was accordingly set to watch that neighbourhood; but he misled her purposely, as

will be remembered, by stating that he had knocked at every house in the street, and had ascertained that no such person as Rainford lived there. Tom was, however, seen by one of the spies, in Piccadilly, on the ensuing (Sunday) evening, as he was returning from Lady Hatfield's house; and he was dogged over to his old abode in Lock's Fields. In the meantime, Tidmarsh had been to Mr. Howard, whom he bribed heavily with gold supplied by Old Death for the purpose; and the lawyer was induced to instruct Dykes, the Bow Street runner to arrest Rainford on the charge of robbing Sir Christopher Blunt. This arrangement with the solicitor was effected on the Saturday afternoon: it was on the Sunday evening that Rainford was dogged to his own abode; and that very night, as soon as the spy could communicate with Mrs. Bunce and Dykes, the arrest of the victim was accomplished in the manner described in a previous chapter. Throughout all these and the subsequent proceedings, Jacob Smith's friendly disposition towards Rainford was not suspected; nor were his visits to Horsemonger Lane Gaol known to the conspirators—inasmuch as the spies, who had been placed in that neighbourhood to watch for Lord Ellingham, had no farther business there when once the Earl was captured and secured.

Such was the substance of the confession, partly elicited fairly and partly extorted from the three worthies—Old Death, Mrs. Bunce, and Mr. Tidmarsh—who were now so completely in the power of the Earl of Ellingham.

"Thus," said Arthur, who, as well as the physician and Jacob Smith, was appalled at the dreadful discoveries now brought to light,—“thus was this tremendous conspiracy to take away the existence of a human being, minutely—I may almost say, scientifically planned in all its details, and carried on with a secrecy and a success that manifested the most infernal talent for wicked combinations! Monsters that ye are!” he cried, unable to retain his feelings any longer; “what vengeance do ye not merit at my hands? But, no—vengeance is for cowards and grovelling miscreants like yourselves! Were I inclined—did I stoop to retaliate and repay ye in your own coin for this enormous misdeed—for you, old man,” he added, turning his indignant glances upon Benjamin Bones, who shrank back in dismay,—“you ere now alluded to that cause which makes me interested in all that regards—or rather regarded,” he said, correcting himself, “your unfortunate victim Thomas Rainford! But, as I was observing—did I choose to wreak revenge on ye three, how easy were it done! I might imprison ye for the remainder of your lives in your own dungeons: I might gag and bind ye in such a way that no cry could escape your lips, and no avenue of escape be possible, and then either leave ye to starve—yes, to starve to death in this room; or I might set fire to the house and consign ye to the torture of flames!”

Mrs. Bunce uttered a faint shriek, and Old Death gave vent to a low moan, as these awful words fell upon their ears: but Tidmarsh remained passive and silent.

Jacob Smith and the domestics gazed upon the Earl in anxious suspense, not unmixed with awe; for, as he spoke, he seemed as if he were armed with an iron eloquence to reproach, and a vicarious power to punish fearfully.

The physician surveyed the three prisoners with ineffable disgust.

“But, no!” resumed the Earl: “I would not condescend—I would not degrade myself so low as to

snatch from your hands the weapons with which you work, and then use them against you! I have yet another point on which I require information: and when your answers, old man," he continued, again addressing himself to Bones, "shall have been given, all that will remain for me to perform is the destruction of your ill-got property, and the adoption of a measure to deprive you of any future interest in these houses with their dark subterranean passage and their horrible dungeons. Benjamin Bones," exclaimed Arthur, after a few moments' pause, "wherefore did you seek to possess yourself of that little boy whom Thomas Rainford had so kindly—so generously—so charitably adopted?"

Old Death explained that as he hoped to be enabled to discover the maternal parent of the lad, and as he conceived that Charley might afford him information calculated to assist him in that pursuit, he had endeavoured to get the child into his power.

"The letter which was found on the person of the deceased Sarah Watts," said the Earl, "doubtless furnished you with ideas of enacting a scheme of extortion against the boy's mother, should you be enabled to find her out, and believing as you do that she is high-born and perhaps wealthy. That letter fell into the hands of Rainford—no matter how; and, though I have not seen it, yet the nature of its contents have been communicated to me. Now, answer me—and answer me truly, if thou canst,—have you any farther clue beyond that which your acquaintance with the nature of that letter furnishes?"

"I have not—I have not," replied the old villain hastily: "if I had, I should not have wanted to get the boy into my power, that I might glean from him as much as he could impart to me."

"I now, then, warn you to think no more of that child, old man," said the Earl; "for he is already beyond the reach of your vile aims—and, even were he not, I would protect him. You see that all your atrocity—all your intriguing—all your black wickedness does not invariably conduct you to the goal of success. But moral lessons are thrown away on such as you. We will therefore terminate this scene as speedily as possible." Then, turning to his domestics, he added, "You will repair into the store-rooms of this house, and you will so destroy and ruin all the rich garments and the larger articles which are there piled up, that they will become comparatively valueless. The jewellery you will convey into the subterranean, and all those trinkets you will throw into the sewer, to which there is an opening from one of the dungeons. Jacob, you will guide my servants in this task."

"No, Jacob—Jacob!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunce hysterically: "have nothing to do with a business which—"

"Silence—silence, I command you!" growled Old Death, turning a savage glance upon the woman, and then fixing a look of demoniac hatred upon the lad, who was already leading the servants into the adjoining rooms.

Mrs. Bunce remained quiet, in obedience to the order she received from Old Death.

"And now relative to these houses—this, and the one in Turnmill Street?" said the nobleman. "Whose property are they?"

"They are my own freehold," responded Bones,—"backed with my money, long, long ago. But you will not—"

"I will not rob you," interrupted the Earl emphatically. "Where are the papers proving your title to the possession of this freehold?"

"In the iron-safe, in one of the store-rooms."

The nobleman quitted the laboratory, but presently returned, saying in a tone of authority, "The key of that safe!"

"It is here—here, in my pocket," muttered the arch-villain. "But my hands are bound—"

The Earl took the key from the pocket of Old Death and again left the laboratory. In a few minutes he reappeared, holding a bundle of papers in his hand.

"I see by the endorsement that these are the deeds which I require," he said. "Now set a value upon your property, and I will pay you the amount. But stay—I will release you, so that you may execute a document which my solicitor has already prepared, and which simply requires the necessary filling up to render it available."

The nobleman drew a parchment deed from his pocket; and, aided by the papers which he had brought from the store-room, inserted the requisite particulars in the blanks left for the purpose.

He then removed the cords which confined Old Death, who named a large sum as the purchase-money of the freehold, and for which the Earl wrote a cheque on his banker without hesitation.

Then the deed of sale and transfer was duly signed by Old Death, and witnessed by Dr. Lascelles.

"This proceeding on my part," said the Earl, when the business was concluded, "may appear arbitrary and even vindictive; but it is necessary, and is not instigated by the spirit of revenge. I have paid you more than double the value of the property; and, therefore, you cannot complain. If you feel aggrieved, remember that it is in my power to transport you for life, on account of the outrage you perpetrated upon me by making me your prisoner in the subterranean which shall never be rendered available to you again. I have now performed the whole of the task which I had imposed upon myself; and you may all three depart!"

Thus speaking, the Earl unbowed Thidmarsh; and, having compelled this individual, as well as Old Death, to surrender their pass-keys to the two houses, he followed those two villains and the equally vile Mrs. Bunce to the front-door.

The three passed out into the street; but before they sped away, Old Death raised his hand, and shaking it ominously, exclaimed, "Lord Ellingham, I will yet be avenged!"

The young nobleman did not condescend to offer a reply, but closed the door, and retraced his way to the laboratory.

"Well, my dear Arthur," said the physician, "I think you have had to deal with as pretty a sample of miscreants as ever underwent examination. None of those," he added, pointing towards the shelf on which the casts of the felons' heads were ranged, "could possibly have competed with them."

"Do you approve, doctor, of all the steps which I have taken?" demanded the young nobleman.

"You have acted admirably," replied Lascelles. "Indeed, you have behaved too well to the chief of those fiends, by paying him double the value of his houses."

"I would not allow even so vile a wretch as he to think that I had wronged him," returned the nobleman. "You can now remain in uninterrupted possession of your laboratory, doctor," he added with a smile. "But let us see how progresses the work of destruction in the other rooms."

Thither the doctor and the Earl proceeded accordingly.

It would have broken Old Death's heart outright to contemplate the rapid work which the nobleman's servants and Jacob Smith were making of the task allotted to them. In the room adjoining the bed-chamber, two of the domestics were employed in breaking the china, tearing the clothes, burning the silk handkerchiefs and the parcels of rich lace, ripping to pieces the muffs and boas, smashing the looking-glasses and pictures, and committing a havoc such as only the peculiar circumstances of the case could have justified. In the other store-room, the third servant and Jacob Smith were unpacking boxes and cases of jewels, and crushing the various valuables with billets of wood.

The fires were lighted in both rooms, and as much property was destroyed as it was safe to consume by those means: the jewellery was all conveyed to the subterranean, and thrown into the common sewer through that aperture which the hands of the nobleman had so lately hollowed in the wall of the dungeon.

The day dawned ere the work of destruction was completed: and then the store-rooms exhibited an appearance forming a strange contrast with their late wealthy aspect.

The physician returned to his house in Grafton Street; and Lord Ellingham hastened home to Pall Mall, leaving his servants and Jacob Smith to follow at their leisure.

In the course of the day he called upon Lady Hatfield, to whom he had already written two or three notes, acquainting her with the outlines of the numerous incidents which had so rapidly occurred since the moment of his escape from the dungeon: and he now gave her a detailed and oral account of all those exciting occurrences.

Their demeanour towards each other was that of an affectionate brother and a fond sister; and when the Earl bade her adieu, they embraced with feelings far different from those which once had filled their hearts.

In the evening, Arthur, accompanied by Jacob Smith, and attended by only a single valet, departed in his travelling-carriage for Dover, whence on the ensuing morning he embarked for France.

CHAPTER LXVI.

MRS. SLINGSBY AND THE BARONET AGAIN.

A few days had elapsed since the events related in the preceding chapter.

We must now again introduce our readers to the abode of Mrs. Slingsby, in Old Burlington Street.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning; the breakfast things had just been cleared away; and the pious lady was sitting in an abstracted—nay, positively mournful mood, holding in her hand the *Morning Herald*, on which, however, her looks were not fixed.

There was something on her mind. She was the prey alike to a source of disquietude and to the embarrassment caused by a projected scheme, beset with difficulties which seemed insuperable.

At length a double knock at the door interrupted her painful reverie; and in a few minutes Sir Henry Courtenay, whom she had been expecting, was announced.

The baronet's countenance was lighted up with an expression of joy and triumph; and, as soon as the

servant had retired, he embraced his mistress with more than his wonted ardour. Still that ardour seemed not to exist on account of her, but rather to arise from feelings which required a vent: it was an embrace that appeared to say, "Congratulate me, for I have succeeded!"

"You are unusually gay this morning, my dear Henry," observed the lady, somewhat piqued at his manner; for her perception was quite keen enough to comprehend the real nature of the baronet's emotions, as we have just described them.

"Martha, my love," responded Sir Henry, "I have just brought a well-laid plot to a successful issue—at least, so far successful, that there can be no doubt as to the result."

"I dare say the project has but little interest for me," exclaimed the lady. "You have become a general *intriguer* I am convinced, Sir Henry; and your conduct is not fair or proper towards me."

"My dear Martha, I have before told you that it is impossible for me to remain completely faithful to you," answered the baronet. "I would not bind myself to any one woman, for all the world. If there be a woman to whom I could so bind myself, it is decidedly yourself."

"Thank you, Sir Henry, for the compliment," said Mrs. Slingsby, a little softened.

"But it is impossible, I repeat. Moreover," continued the baronet, "you must not complain of me—for I do all I can to render you happy. My banker's book is at your service—"

"Well, well," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby, "we will not dispute. Indeed, I have matters of too great an importance upon my mind to permit me to devote attention to petty jealousies and idle frivolities; and I perceive that you have also much to occupy your thoughts. But the revelation shall commence with you. Come, Henry, tell me all you have to say; and when we have discoursed on your affairs, you shall listen to mine."

"Be it so, Martha," said the baronet; then drawing his chair close to that of his mistress, he continued thus: "You are well aware how vexed and annoyed I was when you allowed the two girls to depart in so sudden a manner from the house."

"And you are also aware how cruelly I was discovered and reproached by my nephew Clarence," added Mrs. Slingsby.

"I have not forgotten all you told me on that head, Martha," returned the baronet; "and perhaps what I am going to tell you may set your mind at ease relative to that same nephew of yours."

"Poor Clarence!" exclaimed the lady, really touched as she thought of him. "He has been dreadfully ill ever since that shabby trick which Mr. Torrens played him. For three weeks he was confined to his bed, and was delirious—"

"I know all that, Martha," interrupted the baronet somewhat impatiently. "But do listen to me, as I am going to tell you things which I have hitherto kept altogether to myself. Well, you must know, then, that I was determined not to be discomfited by the abrupt return of Rosamond to her father's house; and I was well aware that, after all which had occurred between Villiers and yourself, you could not possibly give me any further assistance. So I acted for myself. I ascertained every requisite particular relative to this Mr. Torrens; I discovered that he is overwhelmed with difficulties—trembling on the verge of insolvency—and anxious to do any thing that may save him from

so ignominious a fate. I also learnt that he is a man who will sacrifice his best feelings and principles for money. He has a mania for building speculations; and he conceives that if he be only assisted with adequate funds, he shall make a rapid and princely fortune. Love for his daughters he has not: he merely regards them as beautiful objects, to be sold to the highest bidder—and on what terms he scarcely cares, so that they become the means of producing him money. Such is the person on whom I have had to work—and I have not worked ineffectually.”

“Then you have formed an acquaintance with him?” exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby.

“An acquaintance!” cried the baronet, chuckling; “I have formed an intimate friendship.”

“What! in four or five weeks!” said Mrs. Slingsby.

“Exactly so. I obtained an introduction to him through his surveyor, who also happens to be mine; and under pretence of bargaining with him for the purchase of some of his houses, I wormed myself into his confidence. He at length informed me that there were heavy mortgages on all his buildings, and that he was anxious to sell some in order to be able to proceed with others. When I encountered the young ladies, I affected to be greatly surprised that they should prove to be the daughters of the very Mr. Torrens to whom my surveyor had recommended me.”

“You have worked systematically indeed!” exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, with pouting lips. “But pray proceed.”

“Sometimes I was enabled, when I called,” continued the baronet, “to obtain a few minutes’ conversation with Rosamond alone; for Adelais, the elder sister, usually remains in her own chamber, a prey to the deepest melancholy. But Rosamond never appeared to comprehend any of the significant though well wrapt up hints which I dropped relative to my feelings concerning her. It is evident that you proved either a bad tutress, Martha, or she a dull pupil.”

“I presume you are coming to a crisis, Henry,” said Mrs. Slingsby; “for your narrative is somewhat of the most tedious.”

“I will endeavour to render it a little more interesting,” observed the baronet complacently. “A few days ago I called at Torrens Cottage, and found the house in the greatest confusion. An execution had been levied in the morning, and the broker was there, putting a value upon the property. Mr. Torrens was in a state of dark and sombre despair; the young ladies were in their own apartment. I had a long private conversation with the father. He made me acquainted with the entire position of his affairs; and I discovered that five thousand pounds would be required to redeem him from utter ruin. It was then that I gradually unveiled my purposes—it was then that I dropped mysterious hints of my objects and views. At first he was astounded when the light began to dawn upon him, and he caught a glimpse of my meaning; but as I carelessly displayed a roll of notes before him, he grew attentive, and appeared to reflect profoundly.”

“*The man who deliberates, is lost,*” said Mrs. Slingsby, quoting the hacknied proverb, and shuddering—bad, criminal, worthless as she was—at the tremendous amount of guilt which she now more than half suspected to be already perpetrated, or at all events to be approaching its consummation.

“While we were yet far from coming to an open explanation,” continued the baronet, as calmly as if he

were narrating a history of but little moment, “an event occurred which hastened the affair to the catastrophe that I contemplated. A sheriff’s officer entered and arrested Mr. Torrens for a considerable amount—seven hundred pounds. The execution levied on the property in the house was for three hundred and forty; and thus he required an immediate advance of upwards of a thousand pounds to save himself from a prison, and his furniture from a public sale in due course. I requested the officer to withdraw from the room for a few minutes, stating who I was, and pledging myself that Mr. Torrens should not attempt to escape. I will not tell you all that then took place between me and the father of those girls: let it suffice for you to learn, that at the expiration of nearly an hour’s discourse—varied on his part by appeals, threats, prayers, and imprecations—he agreed to sell his daughter Rosamond.”

“As your wife?” exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, in a hoarse, hollow tone.

“No—as my mistress—as any thing I choose,” returned Sir Henry Courtenay, emphatically.

Mrs. Slingsby shuddered from head to foot.

“How silly of you to affect horror at such an event!” exclaimed the baronet.

“Yes—it is silly on my part!” cried Mrs. Slingsby, bitterly; “silly, because I ought to have played a different part when first you touched upon the subject a few weeks ago. But, my God! Henry—you cannot mean—you will not, surely—surely—”

“Martha, this passes all endurance,” said the baronet sternly. “If you do not choose to listen to me I can retire: if you will not assist me, there is an end to every thing between you and me—and then, how will you live?”

“What assistance do you require?” asked the widow, in a low and tremulous tone—for she was shocked at all she had heard, and she was terrified by the menace which the baronet had just uttered.

“You shall learn,” answered the latter. “I advanced the sums necessary to save Mr. Torrens from a prison and his furniture from the effects of the levy, taking his note of hand, payable on demand, for the amount—so that should he wish to retract from his bargain, he is completely in my power. I have agreed to give him five thousand pounds in all—as the price of his daughter. But he represented to me that the project can never be carried into execution, until Adelais and Rosamond shall have been separated. I was not unprepared for such an objection; and I accordingly proposed that he should permit Clarence Villiers to marry Adelais without delay—her drooping health serving as the plea for this relenting disposition on his part. I moreover promised my special protection on behalf of Clarence, for whom I can speedily obtain a government situation of far greater emolument than the paltry clerkship which he now holds. Then, when the wedding is over, and the young couple have quitted London, to pass the honeymoon somewhere in the country, you will request Rosamond to spend a few days at your house.”

And the baronet fixed a significant look upon his mistress as he uttered these words, so pregnant with terrible meaning.

“Impossible!” exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby: “if the deed were done here—beneath this roof—it would ruin me!”

“Ridiculous!” cried the baronet; and he proceeded to argue his hellish project in a manner which showed how fully he had considered it in all its details, and



how artfully he had devised the means to render an exposure improbable.

But we cannot place on record all that was urged by him, or objected to by his mistress, on this particular point; suffice it to say that, influenced by the menaces more than by the reasoning which came from his lips, the pious lady at last consented to become the pander to his damnable machinations.

"Mr. Torrens shall this day write a letter to your nephew and invite him to the Cottage," said the baronet, when the whole plan was fully agreed upon.

"Clarence will not of course be suffered to know that any interference on my part has brought about a reconciliation between him and the father of his beloved. The marriage will be hurried on as much as much as possible, and then Rosamond will become mine! But is Clarence sufficiently recovered from his illness to leave his dwelling?"

"He is much better than he was a few days ago," returned Mrs. Slingsby; "but when he first awoke to consciousness, after a month's duration of alarming illness and almost constant delirium, he received a severe shock, which produced a partial relapse. In a word, he inquired concerning the highwayman Thomas

Rainford; and, on hearing that he had suffered the penalty of death, he exhibited the most painful and heart-rending emotions."

"But can he leave his room? Is he well enough to move out again?" demanded the baronet impatiently.

"Yes: he was here yesterday," answered Mrs. Slingsby. "Moreover, a letter conveying to him such joyful news as those which Mrs. Torrens will have to impart, cannot fail to restore him speedily to health and good spirits."

"Thus far all goes well," said Sir Henry Courtenay. "And now, Martha, my love, it is your turn to speak."

"I have consented to serve you, Henry, in a most difficult and dangerous scheme," observed the lady, after a few moments' reflection; "may I hope for aid and support from you in a plan which I have formed?"

"Certainly. Proceed—my curiosity is already excited."

"Henry," said Mrs. Slingsby, sinking her voice to a low and serious tone; "I am again——"

The baronet started.

"Yes—again with child," added the widow; "and on this occasion I intend to turn to a good account what would otherwise be deemed a terrible misfortune."

"I cannot for the life of me understand you," exclaimed Sir Henry Courtenay.

"I will explain myself," resumed Mrs. Slingsby. "You are well aware of the readiness which even well-informed persons in this country manifest to put faith in anything monstrous or preposterous that may be proclaimed or established under the cloak of religion. The greater the falsehood, the more greedily it is swallowed. There is that scoundrel and hypocrite Sheepshanks, for instance, who was so completely exposed a few weeks ago: he has taken a chapel somewhere in the Tottenham Court Road, and preached for the first time last Sunday. He has now become a dissenter; and in his initial sermon he dwelt boldly and long on the errors of which he had been guilty. He declared that he had been sorely beset by Satan, to whom he had for a time succumbed: hence his disgraceful fall. But he proceeded to aver that he and Satan had since then had a long and desperate struggle together, throughout an entire night, in his bed-chamber; and that he eventually succeeded in sending the Evil One howling away just as the day broke. He therefore proclaimed that he had now emancipated himself from the thralldom of hell, and was a chosen vessel of heaven once again. This discourse produced such an effect, that when he descended from the pulpit, many of the congregation pressed forward to shake him by the hand; and he is now in a more fragrant odour of sanctity than ever."

"To what is all this to lead, Martha?" inquired Sir Henry, completely bewildered by the long tirade relative to Mr. Sheepshanks.

"I merely mentioned the circumstances which I have related, for the purpose of convincing you how easily the world is duped by persons professing extreme sanctity," continued Mrs. Slingsby.

"To be sure!" ejaculated Sir Henry: "there are always plenty of fools to assemble at the beck and word of a knave."

"And it is with these impressions," added the widow, "that I intend to convert my present misfortune into an honour and a source of immense profit."

"May I be hanged if I understand one word of all you are saying!" cried the baronet, completely bewildered. "You are in the family way again, it appears; and yet you glory in the circumstance!"

"Doubtless you have heard the story of Johanna Southcott?"* said the widow, with a glance full of meaning.

"And you would imitate that imposture!" exclaimed Sir Henry: "'tis madness—sheer madness! Your nephew, who knows how intimate you and I are together, would expose the miserable trick."

"That is the principal difficulty which I should have to encounter," said Mrs. Slingsby, in a calm tone: "and even that is not insurmountable. I require your aid, indeed, on that very point. The change which, to suit *your* views, has taken place—or will speedily take place—relative to the position of Clarence and Adelaide, already smoothes down much of the difficulty alluded to. Clarence will receive the benefit of your interest: exact that interest, then, to procure him a situation in some distant colony—or the East Indies, if you will—and his absence will alike render *you* more secure in the enjoyment of your Rosamond's person, and will remove to a distance the only individual who could possibly interfere with *my* project."

"Martha, this scheme of yours is utter madness, I repeat," exclaimed the baronet. "I will have nothing to do with it. If you attempt to palm so ridiculous a deceit on the world, all sorts of prying inquiries will be made, and the real nature of our intimacy must in that case be inevitably discovered. No—it shall not be done! I will give you money to go abroad, if you choose, when your situation may render necessary a temporary disappearance from London; but to consent to this insane project——"

"Well, well, Henry," interrupted the lady, terrified by the vehemence of the baronet's manner, "you shall have your own way."

"Now you are reasonable," said Sir Henry, drawing his chair closer to that in which she was seated, and beginning to toy with her.

But we need not prolong our description of this interview. Suffice it to say, that Mrs. Slingsby consented to abandon her atrocious scheme of representing herself as a second Johanna Southcott, and on the other hand promised to lend her aid to the no less infamous conspiracy formed against the honour of the unsuspecting Rosamond Torrens—for which concessions the pious and excellent lady received a cheque for a considerable sum on Sir Henry Courtenay's bankers.

* * * * *

The plan which Mrs. Slingsby had conceived,

* Partington's "Dictionary of Universal Biography" contains the following brief but faithful account of that impious and abominable impostress, Johanna Southcott:

"She was a singular fanatic, whose extravagant pretensions attracted a numerous band of converts in London and its vicinity, said to have, at one period, amounted to upwards of 100,000. She was born in the west of England, about the year 1750, of parents in very humble life, and, being carried away by a heated imagination, gave herself out as the woman spoken of in the book of Revelation. In this capacity she for awhile carried on a lucrative trade in the sale of seals, which were, under certain conditions, to secure the salvation of the purchasers. A disorder subsequently giving her the outward appearance of pregnancy, after she had passed her grand climacteric, she announced herself as the mother of the promised Shiloh, whose speedy advent she predicted. The faith of her followers, among whom were several clergymen of the established church, rose to enthusiasm. A cradle of the most expensive materials, and highly decorated, was prepared by her expectant votaries at a fashionable upholsterer's, and every preparation made

for the reception of the miraculous babe that superstition and credulity could induce. About the close of the year 1814, however, the prophetess began to have her misgivings during some comparatively lucid intervals, in which she declared that, 'if she was deceived, she had, at all events, been the sport of some spirit, either good or evil;' and the 27th December in that year, death put an end to both her hopes and fears. With her followers, however, it was otherwise; and though for a time confounded by her decease, which they could scarcely believe to be real, her speedy resurrection was confidently anticipated. In this persuasion many lived and died, nor is her sect yet extinct: but, within a short period, several families of her disciples were living together in the neighbourhood of Chatham, in Kent, remarkable for the length of their beads and the general singularity of their appearance. The body of Johanna underwent an anatomical investigation after her death, when the extraordinary appearance of her shape was accounted for upon medical principles; and her remains were conveyed for interment, under a fictitious name, to the burying ground attached to the chapel in St. John's Wood."

would never for one moment have obtained any degree of consistency in her imagination, had she not been well aware that there were thousands and tens of thousands of credulous gulls—superstitious dolts and idiots—miserable and contemptible fanatics, who would have greedily swallowed the impious, blasphemous, and atrocious lie.

In earnest belief of the Christian religion, and for profound veneration of all the sublime truths and doctrines taught by the Bible, we yield to no living being:—but it is not with common patience that we contemplate that disgusting readiness which so many of our fellow-countrymen exhibit to put faith in the false prophets and hypocrites who start up on all sides, each with some saving system of his own.

Not many years have elapsed since the Reverend Mr. Irving electrified all England with his “unknown tongues,” and there were impostors and fanatics, or fools and knaves, prompt to give an impulse to that memorable delusion by lending themselves to the cheat.

In this civilized country, too—in the nineteenth century—in a land whose sons proclaim themselves to be farther advanced in knowledge and enlightening principles than any other race on the surface of the earth—in one of the counties, moreover, where the refinement of intellect is supposed to prevail to a degree of brilliancy certainly not excelled in other parts of the kingdom,—there—in the neighbourhood of the cathedral city of Canterbury—did a madman, at no very remote date, assemble a host of enthusiastic believers in his horrible assumption of the name and attributes of the SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD! Yes—in the vicinity of a town presumed to possess all the benefit which the knowledge and learning of innumerable clergymen can possibly impart, did Mad Tom successfully personate the Messiah for several days!

But, oh! how sad—how mournful is it to contemplate the course which the Government of England is taking at the instant while we are penning these lines! A General Fast, to propitiate the Almighty, and to induce Him to avert his wrath from Ireland! Holy God! do thy thunders sleep when men thus blaspheme thy sacred name—thus actually reproach Thee with the effects of their misdeeds?

When misgovernment has brought Ireland to the verge of desperation,—when landlords have drained the country of its resources to be expended in the British metropolis,—when the agents and middlemen have exercised the full amount of petty tyranny and goading oppression upon the unhappy tenants,—when the Irish pride has been insulted by the symbols of subjection until endurance is no longer possible,—when the ambition of many gifted minds has been chafed and irritated at being excluded from a career of honour they would otherwise have pursued,—when all the humanizing effects of civilization have been restricted by a perpetual collision between the triumphant Protestant religion on the one hand domineering with insolence, and the defeated Catholic religion on the other looking for the chance of regaining a lost ascendancy,—when, too, an unprincipled system of agitation has fanned the flame of the worst feelings and extorted the few pence from the pockets of the half-starving peasantry,—when all these influences, forming an aggregate powerful enough to crush the most

flourishing country upon the face of the earth, have been brought to bear upon unhappy Ireland, and have reduced her population to a misery which with such fertile causes was inevitable,—there are to be found men who are bold enough, in their deplorable ignorance or their abominable impiety, to accuse the Almighty of having purposely afflicted Ireland!

People of the British Isles! be not deceived by this blasphemous proceeding—a proceeding that would shift an awful responsibility from the shoulders of incompetent statesmen, and lay it to the account of heaven! Our blood runs cold as we write these lines—we shudder as we contemplate the wickedness of this impious subterfuge!

A General Fast to propitiate the Almighty—when the misgovernment and the misdeeds of men have worked all the horrible results complained of! Carlile, Hone, Richard Taylor, Tom Paine, and the whole host of avowed infidels were never prosecuted by the Attorney-general for blasphemy worse than that which attributes to the Almighty the effects of the errors, ignorance, despotism, and short-sightedness of human beings!

God has given us a fair and beautiful world to dwell in,—he has endowed us with intelligence to make the most of the produce of the soil,—and his revealed laws and doctrines have supplied us with precepts competent to maintain order and regularity in society. HE manifests no caprice—no change: the seasons come in due course, each bringing its peculiar bounties;—and it depends upon ourselves to render our abiding-places here scenes of comfort, happiness, and contentment. But if by our own ignorance, wickedness, or tyrannical behaviour, we succeed in rendering any one spot of this fair and beautiful world a prey to famine and its invariable attendant—pestilence,—if we undertake to govern a country which we have conquered, and instead of applying beneficial and suitable measures, heap insult, wrong, error, and oppression upon its people,—how can we be surprised that the worst results should ensue? and how can we be so wickedly blind, or so vilely hypocritical, as to attempt to cast upon the dispensations of Providence those lamentable evils which we ourselves have engendered?

Again we say that a more abominable insult to the Majesty of Heaven was never perpetrated, than that conveyed by the motives set forth as a reason for a General Fast! The Ministers who have advised Queen Victoria to assent to such a hideous mockery, are unworthy the confidence of the nation. England will become the laughing-stock—the scorn—the derision of the whole world. Oh! we feel ashamed of belonging to a country in which such monstrous proceedings are set in motion under the solemn sanction of the Sovereign and her Ministers!

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE MARRIAGE.—ROSAMOND.

A FORTNIGHT had passed since the interview between Mrs. Slingsby and Sir Henry Courtenay; and the machinations of the latter had so successfully prevailed in accelerating the matters in which he was interested, that on the morning, when we must request our readers to accompany us to Torrens

Cottage, the marriage of Adelaïs and Clarence Villiers was to take place.

The young man was still pale from the effects of recent and severe indisposition; but the happiness which he had experienced during the last fourteen days had worked a greater physical improvement in him than six months' sojourn in the south of France could possibly have done.

Firmly believing that the declining health and drooping spirits of Adelaïs had alone induced Mr. Torrens to revoke a decree which was to have separated them for ever,—and not over anxious to revive past topics in connexion with the subject,—Clarence gave himself completely up to the happiness which now awaited him; and his Adelaïs was equally ready to bury in oblivion any disagreeable reflections relative to the late conduct of her father.

Mr. Torrens was cold, moody, and distant: but this was his manner—and, as the young people knew not what fierce fires raged beneath that aspect of ice, they did not bestow any unusual attention on the subject.

The only source of grief which the sisters knew was their approaching separation; for Mr. Torrens had arranged for the young couple to proceed into Devonshire and pass the honeymoon with some distant relations of his own, who were anxious to see their beautiful cousin Adelaïs. Rosamond was to remain with her father, Mrs. Slingsby not having as yet sent her an invitation to Old Burlington Street, for fear that Clarence might throw some obstacle in the way of its being accepted.

Thus stood matters on the bridal morning,—when Adelaïs appeared pre-eminently beautiful in her garb of virgin white—emblematical of the innocence of her own heart,—and when Clarence Villiers could scarcely persuade himself that he was actually touching on the threshold of complete felicity. Rosamond—poor Rosamond smiled amidst the tears that flowed fast down her pale cheeks; for she felt as if she were losing her best—her only friend in the approaching departure of Adelaïs.

There was a young lady—a friend—who acted as joint bridesmaid with Rosamond; and there were two or three other acquaintances of the family;—and of the persons thus enumerated consisted the bridal party. The sisters had naturally invited Mrs. Slingsby; but that lady, aware that her presence would not be agreeable to her nephew, had sent to plead indisposition as the excuse for her absence.

And Mr. Torrens—what was the nature of his feelings now? Forced by his necessities—or rather by that indomitable pride which urged him to make every sacrifice rather than boldly meet his embarrassments in the Bankruptcy Court—he had assented to bestow his elder daughter on a young man whom he disliked, and to sell his younger child to an atrocious villain, who had not even manifested the delicacy of hinting at marriage!

Reader! think not that when we record the dreadful fact of a father consenting to sell his own daughter for gold, we are fabricating for a romance an incident which never occurred in real life! Such things have been done often—are done often—and will be done often, so long as the human species shall exist. The immense wealth of that corrupt and detestable monster, the late Marquis of Hert-

ford,* enabled him to purchase the favours not only of Lady S—, but also induced that profligate woman to sell to him every one of her daughters! And those daughters have since married titled men, and live splendidly upon the riches bequeathed to them by the horrible voluptuary. Again, but a few years have elapsed since a certain Lady H— sold her beautiful daughter Priscilla to a most ignoble lord; and the atrocious deed became the topic of numerous articles in the English and continental newspapers, the tribunals of France having taken cognizance of the scandal!

We could make mention of innumerable instances of this kind, the greater portion of which are, however, confined to the aristocratic circles. For it must necessarily occur that the “upper classes,” as they insolently denominate themselves, are the most profligate, unprincipled, and licentious of all the sections into which society is divided. Wealth and idleness, associated, must, as a general rule, give a fearful impulse to immorality: rich viands and generous wines must heat the blood; and nights of dissipation—balls, routs, *sotées*, and card-parties—inflame the imagination. The voluptuous dances which prevail in those fashionable assemblies—the indecent manner in which the ladies of the “upper class” display so much of the bosom that but little scope is left for the exercise of fancy—the positive encouragement that is given in high life to men whose reputation as vile seducers is notorious,—all these circumstances foster licentiousness, and provide a constant aliment to sustain immorality.

Again, the morals of the fashionable world have not recovered from the effects of that dangerous poison which was instilled into them by the evil examples of the family of George the Third, and the flagrant conduct of the beastly voluptuary, George the Fourth. The licentiousness of the Princesses of that family became the public scandal of the day; and from the ladies of the Court emanated the fashion of wearing hoops to their dresses, for a purpose which need not be particularly described. But fashion subsists by the artifice of constant change; and when hoops had enjoyed their day, those ladies who had found them so convenient, actually devised the scheme of giving vogue to a padding in front to *make the wearers appear in the family way*! This is no fiction; and young, unmarried girls, as well as married ladies, actually submitted to this disgraceful and immoral fashion through servile obedience to the example of the Princesses. This was positively holding out a premium to licentiousness—because the fear of a false step indicating itself by its consequences, was annihilated.

Every one knows that many titled ladies gloried in the reputation of being (as they really were) the mistresses of George the Fourth. With all these frightful examples in view, how could the entire sphere of the fashionable world fail to become dreadfully demoralised? and how was it possible to prevent the contaminating influence from spreading to the inferior grades? Therefore is it that the fashionable world especially—being the first to experience that influence and the most likely to perpetuate it—has not yet recovered from the effects of the evil example of the Court. True is it, thank God! that Queen Victoria has not followed the same course which so many of her near relatives adopted: but still even her bright example can only gradually mitigate, and not in a moment destroy,

* Represented as the Marquis of Holmesford in the First Series of “THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON.”

the effects of the moral poison instilled into fashionable society by her royal predecessors.

Previously to the first revolution in France, the aristocracy were steeped in licentiousness and profligacy. But a glorious nation rose in its might—hurled down a throne encrusted with the miseries of the people—annihilated the bloated and infamous nobility—and even gave the proud and arrogant clergy such a lesson as they have never since forgotten. The aristocracy of France have never recovered that blow—and, thank heaven! never will. The hereditary peerage exists no longer in France; and titles of nobility are valueless. Thus, by virtually destroying the aristocracy of rank and birth, France has suppressed a sewer of filth and corruption which distilled its abominations through every grade and phase of society. The aristocracy of talent has been substituted; and the mechanic may now rise to be a minister—the ploughman has his fair chance of becoming a politician—the delver of the soil can aspire to the post of deputy. France is regenerated: England can become so only by the destruction of its hereditary aristocracy.

From this long digression, we return to the bridal party assembled at Torrens Cottage, and now about to repair to the adjacent church, where the nuptial bond was to be indissolubly tied.

And to that church did the party proceed,—the father, who looked upon his daughters as the means of filling his purse,—the daughters, who knew not the utter selfishness of their sire,—the young man, who was so indescribably happy in at length accompanying to the altar her whom he loved so well,—and the guests, who thought as much of the excellent breakfast which followed as of the solemn ceremony itself.

The banquet passed—and the time came for the departure of the newly married couple. A post chaise drove up to the door—the trunks were hastily conveyed to the vehicle—and Adelaïs was torn away from the arms of her young sister Rosamond, who clung frantically to her.

An hour afterwards, the guests were gone—and Rosamond remained alone with her father.

"God grant that my dearest sister may be happy!" said the maiden, her voice almost completely lost in sobs.

"If she is not, it will be her own fault," observed Mr. Torrens harshly, as he paced the room. "She would have the young man—she set her heart upon him—and I have yielded. I suppose you are now sorry that she is gone; and yet I dare swear you thought me a brutal tyrant for separating the love-sick pair a few weeks ago."

"My dearest, dearest father!" exclaimed Rosamond, profoundly afflicted and even annoyed at the manner in which she was addressed,—"*wherefore* speak to me thus? Have I ever given you any reason to suppose that I was so undutiful as—"

"As to run away from the house with your sister—eh?" interrupted Mr. Torrens in a biting, satirical tone. "A young lady who could take such a step, would not be very particular in her observations on her father's conduct."

"Heavens! how have I deserved these reproaches—at least to-day?" asked Rosamond, bursting into an agony of tears. "Shall not the past be forgotten? will you ever continue, my dear father, to recall those events which are naturally so painful—"

"Well, well—let us say no more about it, Rosa-

mond," cried Mr. Torrens, ashamed of having vented his ill-humour upon his daughter.

And he paced the room in a manner denoting a strange and indomitable agitation.

The fact was that the miserable father recoiled in horror from the atrocity he had agreed to perpetrate; and, with an idiosyncrasy so common amongst men who tremble upon the verge of committing a fearful crime, he turned on the intended victim as if she were the wilful and conscious cause of those black feelings that raged within his breast. He had not moral courage sufficient to retreat while it was yet time—he dared not make the comparatively small sacrifice of himself to avoid the immeasurably greater one which involved the immolation of his daughter.

Rosamond was already deeply afflicted at parting with her sister—that sister from whom she had never been separated until now—but she was doomed to experience additional sources of grief in the harsh manner and alarming agitation of her father.

At length, unable any longer to endure the state of suspense and uncertainty in which she was suddenly plunged concerning him, she rose from her seat—advanced timidly towards him—and, throwing one of her snowy arms over his shoulder, murmured in a plaintive tone, "Father—dearest father, what dreadful cause of sorrow oppresses you now? Are you fearful that Adelaïs will not be happy—that Clarence will not always be good and kind to her? Oh! yes, dearest father—I am sure he will—"

"I am not thinking of the daughter who is gone," exclaimed Mr. Torrens, suddenly interrupting the maiden, and speaking in a tone no longer harsh, but positively wild with despair: "my thoughts are intent on the daughter who is left behind!"

"Am I a source of affliction to you, father?" asked Rosamond, contemplating her sire in so plaintive, melancholy, and yet tender a manner that his vile heart was for a moment touched, and he felt ready to throw himself at her feet and implore her pardon for the ill he meditated towards her. "Tell me, my beloved parent," she said, "have I given you offence in any way—by word or deed? Oh! if I have, bitter will be the tears that I shall shed; and sincerely—most sincerely shall I beseech your forgiveness."

"No, Rosamond," said Mr. Torrens, crushing the better feelings of his soul as he thought of the ruin that would envelop him were he to retract his engagements with the baronet: "you have not offended me—and I believe I spoke harshly to you just now without a cause. But let us talk no more on that subject. Compose yourself—wipe away those tears. I shall now retire to my study—for I have letters of importance to write."

But at that moment the well-known knock of the postman resounded through the house; and almost immediately afterwards a servant entered the room, handed a letter to Rosamond, and then withdrew.

"A note for *me*!" exclaimed the young lady, in surprise, while Mr. Torrens' blood ran cold and his brain whirled. "Oh! it is from dear Mrs. Slingsby—I recognise the handwriting."

And hastily opening it, she glanced over the contents.

Mr. Torrens was about to leave the room, as if

the arrival of the letter were a matter of perfect indifference to him.

"One moment, dear father," said Rosamond, detaining him by the arm: "you must read this beautiful letter which Mrs. Slingsby has written to me; and though I cannot think of accepting the kind invitation which it conveys—"

"What does Mrs. Slingsby say in her letter, then?" demanded Mr. Torrens, all his ill-humour returning as this further step in the hideous plot re-awakened his most poignant reflections; "what does she say, that you speak in such enthusiastic terms of a mere letter?"

Rosamond placed the note in his hand; and Mr. Torrens, turning aside towards the window, read the contents, as follow:—

"It has greatly distressed me, my beloved young friend, to have been unable to attend at the solemnization of the holy and yet deeply affecting ceremony, which, by the time this reaches you, will have united my excellent nephew and your sweet sister. But it has pleased the Almighty, in his inscrutable wisdom, to afflict me with a severe rheumatism at this time, as I assured you in a previous note, and although I sincerely hope that, by the blessing of that all-wise Being and the aid of the lotion which Dr. Wagtail has sent me, I shall be well in a few days, yet I am compelled for the present to remain within the house. It is my most sincere and heartfelt hope that your dear sister and my beloved nephew may experience all that happiness which the Omnipotent may deign to bestow upon his elect. One circumstance must essentially tend to smooth down those mundane asperities which, alas! they will have to encounter in the rough path of life; and that is the religious faith with which they are both imbued. For myself, I can safely declare that if it were not for the consolations which the Holy Bible imparts to all who study its divine doctrines, and for the solace afforded me by a few kind friends (amongst whom I must include that most choice vessel of the Lord, Sir Henry Courtenay), I know not how I should bear up against the grievous pains wherewith it has pleased the Most High to afflict me, and which have just passed from the right foot into the left. Doubtless it is for my eternal welfare, in a better world, that I am thus chastened in this; although Dr. Wagtail, with a levity unbecoming a professional man of his age and standing, declares that if I keep my feet well swathed in flannel and take mustard baths or going to bed, I shall triumph over the ailment. But, oh! my dearest young friend, what is flannel without the blessing of heaven? what is mustard without the aid of the Most High? I am very lonely, sweet Rosamond; and I am fearful that you must miss your dear sister much. I know that Mr. Torrens' occupations take him much from home; and thus you cannot always enjoy the presence and the consolations of your excellent father, whom, I regret to say, I only as yet know by good report, but whose hand I hope to press some day in friendship. Will you, my love, come and pass a week or two with me? It will be a perfect charity on your part; and I am convinced also that change of scene will cheer your spirits. Come to me, my dearest Rosamond, early to-morrow morning (God willing)—if your good kind father can spare you.

"Ever your sincere and attached friend,

"MARTHA SLINGSBY."

The vile hypocrisy which characterised this letter enhanced, if possible, the blackness of that crime towards the consummation of which it was so material a step; and Mr. Torrens stood gazing upon the document until all its characters seemed to move and agitate on the surface of the paper like a legion of hideous reptiles swarming together.

But at length mastering his horribly painful emotions, he turned towards his daughter, saying, "And wherefore, Rosamond, should you not accept an invitation as kind as it is considerate?"

"Oh! my dear father," exclaimed the maiden, "I could not think of leaving you at a time when you have just lost the society of one of your children. Moreover, I perceive that you are not entirely happy—I fear that those recent embarrassments—"

"Speak not of them, Rosamond," interrupted Mr. Torrens sternly; for so great was his pride, that he could not endure the idea of his own daughters being acquainted with his late pecuniary difficulties. "To return to the subject of that letter," he added, after a few moments' pause, "I think you cannot do better than accept the invitation:—indeed, it would appear unkind were you to refuse it. Mrs. Slingsby is suffering from indisposition—and she is evidently anxious to have a companion. Therefore, Rosamond, I must beg you to commence your preparations for the visit."

The young lady urged various remonstrances against this resolution; but her father over-ruled them all—and it was accordingly determined at length that she should repair to Old Burlington Street on the following morning.

But when the morning came, and the vehicle which was to convey her to London drove up to the door, how appalling were the feelings which agitated, — nay, absolutely raged in the breast of Mr. Torrens!

Acute—intensely acute was the pain which he endured in endeavouring to subdue those emotions, —or rather in composing his features in such a way that his countenance might not indicate the awful warring that disturbed his soul.

With streaming eyes did Rosamond take leave of her father; and as she stepped into the chaise, a presentiment of evil flashed across her imagination.

But she was young—naturally inclined to look upon the bright side of things—and too inexperienced to know much of the dreadful pit-falls which the artifice of man has hollowed in the pathways of the moral world. Her misgiving was therefore forgotten almost as soon as it was entertained; and she was in comparatively good spirits—though still affected by her recent separation from her sister—when she alighted at the door of Mrs. Slingsby's residence in Old Burlington Street.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

DR. WAGTAIL.—ROSAMOND TORRENS.

ROSAMOND TORRENS found the pious lady reclining on a sofa, and so profoundly absorbed—at all events, apparently so—in the perusal of a chapter in the New Testament, that she did not immediately look up when the drawing-room door opened to give the young maiden admission.

"Ah! my dearest girl—is it indeed you?" at length said Mrs. Slingsby in a dolorous tone of voice, as she laid aside the sacred volume. "Come and embrace me, sweet Rosamond."

"I hope you are better to-day, my dear madam," was the sincere observation made by the intended victim of a damnable plot, as she pressed her pure lips to Mrs. Slingsby's polluted brow.

"Heaven blessed me with a good night's rest, my love," returned the pious lady; "and Dr. Wagtail would insist upon my taking a little warm brandy-and-water—although, as you well know, I

loathe alcoholic liquor, which I do not consider to be a 'good creature of God,' nor 'fitted for our use.' But, as a medicine, Rosamond—and when accompanied by urgent prayer—it is beneficial. And now tell me, sweet girl, how passed off the bridal ceremony? Was the conduct of my nephew becoming and proper? I could scarcely suppose otherwise—seeing that for years he has been benefited by the advice and example which it has been my happy lot to afford him. And Adalais—was she much affected, my love?"

Rosamond described the particulars of the wedding; and Mrs. Slingsby was in the midst of some very comforting remarks thereon, when the door opened and Dr. Wagtail made his appearance.

This gentleman was a short, fat, important-looking personage—with a powdered head and a pig-tail—delighting, too, in small-clothes and black gaiters, and carrying a thick bamboo cane, the gold head of which he invariably applied to his nose when he wanted to appear more than usually solemn. He enjoyed a large practice, and was yet miserably ignorant of the medical art. What, then, was the secret of his success? We will explain the mystery.

His father was a very wealthy man, and paid a premium of £800 to apprentice the subject of this sketch to the house-surgeon of one of the great metropolitan hospitals. But young Wagtail, though cunning and crafty enough, was a wretched dolt, and only succeeded in passing his examination by dint of the most extraordinary cramming. By these means, however, he became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, and set up in business for himself. The house-surgeon of this hospital soon after hinted to him that he intended to resign; and Mr. Wagtail senior, on hearing this private communication made to his son, immediately sent the house-surgeon a five-hundred pound note in a gold snuff-box, "as a token of esteem for his high character and of admiration for his splendid talents." This was intelligible enough. The house-surgeon immediately began to canvass his friends on behalf of young Wagtail as his successor; and when the resignation of the said house-surgeon was publicly announced, the majority of the persons who had a right to vote were already enlisted in the cause of Mr. Wagtail. Several of the most eminent surgeons became candidates for the vacancy; but their abilities stood no chance when weighed against Mr. Wagtail's interest—and Mr. Wagtail was accordingly elected. He thus jumped into renown and handsome emolument almost as soon as he entered the profession; and things went on smoothly enough for three or four years, until he one morning took it into his head to cut off a man's leg, when amputation was positively unnecessary. A disturbance ensued—the thing got into the newspapers—and Mr. Wagtail employed three poor authors constantly, for six months, at half-a-crown a day each, to get up the pamphlets which he issued in his defence. He so inundated the British public with his printed statements that he literally bullied or persuaded the majority into a belief that he was right after all; and then, with becoming indignation, he threw up his berth at the hospital—took a magnificent house at the West End—got his doctor's diploma at the same time—and announced through the medium of the *Morning Post*, *Morning Herald*, and *St. James's Chronicle*, that "Dr. Wagtail

might be consulted daily, at his residence, from 2 till 7." His father died soon afterwards, leaving him a handsome fortune; and as the doctor, when the time of mourning (which he cut as short as possible) had expired, began to give splendid entertainments, his dinners procured him friends, and his friends procured him patients. In fact, he eventually rose so high in public estimation at the West End, that he was quoted as the rival of the celebrated Dr. Lascelles;—but wise men shook their heads, as much as to intimate that Dr. Lascelles had more medical knowledge in his little finger than Dr. Wagtail possessed in his entire form. But then Dr. Wagtail was so important-looking, and had such a knowing and mysterious way with him,—and he never insulted his patients, as Dr. Lascelles sometimes did, by telling them that they had nothing the matter with them, but were mere hypochondriacs. On the contrary, he would gratify their fancies by prescribing pills and draughts till he made them ill in reality; and then he had some little trouble in curing them again. But as he administered plenty of medicine—shook his head a great many times even when ordering a foot-bath or a bread poultice—and dropped mysterious hints about its being very fortunate that he was called in just at that precise moment, or else there would have been no answering for the consequences,—as he did all this, and was particularly liberal to nurses, valets, and ladies-maids, he had worked his way up to a degree of eminence which real talent, legitimately exercised, struggled fruitlessly in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred to arrive at.

Such was the physician who now entered the drawing-room where Mrs. Slingsby was reclining on the sofa with Rosamond seated near her.

Bowing with important condescension to Miss Torrens, the doctor quietly took the chair which she vacated, because it was close to his patient.

Rosamond was about to quit the room, when Mrs. Slingsby desired her to remain, adding, "Dr. Wagtail does not require your absence, my love: there is nothing so very important in my case—is there, doctor?"

"Important, my dear madam, is not precisely the word," returned the physician, with his gold-headed cane to his nose; "inasmuch as your ailment is important—as all ailments are, when, though trivial in themselves, they may lead to dangerous consequences. But how are we to-day, my dear madam? how is the pain in our legs? did we suffer much last night? or did we feel a *little* easier?"

"Yes, doctor—thank you," replied the sufferer, who had nothing at all the matter with her, but who had merely simulated indisposition as an excuse for absenting herself from the bridal: "I passed a better night—by the blessing of heaven!"

"Well—come—and so we are getting on nicely, eh?" observed the doctor. "And what did we take for supper last evening?"

"A little gruel, doctor—as you ordered," answered Mrs. Slingsby, in a lachrymose tone—which was really natural enough, seeing that she could have eaten a roast fowl instead of the farinaceous slop.

"And did we take a very *little* brandy-and-water hot?" asked Dr. Wagtail, in a most insinuating voice, as much as to say that he knew very well how revolting such a beverage must have been to Mrs. Slingsby; although, in his heart, he had

recommended it simply because experience had taught him that ladies of a certain age did *not* object to a small dose of cognac:—"did we take a *little* brandy-and-water?"

"I did so far follow your advice, doctor," replied Mrs. Slingsby; "but I hope I am not to continue it?"

"Indeed but we must though, my dear madam," exclaimed the physician, shaking his head most solemnly and with all the air of a man enforcing the necessity of swallowing a nauseous draught:—"indeed but we must though,—and a trifle stronger, too—a mere trifle;—but stronger it must be, or I really cannot answer for the consequences."

And here he looked at Miss Torrens, as much as to imply that Mrs. Slingsby's life would perhaps be endangered if his advice were not punctually and accurately followed.

"Well, doctor," said the suffering lady, in a more doleful tone than ever, "if it must be stronger, it shall be: but pray make a cure of me (God willing) as soon as possible, so that I may renounce that vile alcoholic beverage."

"We must have patience, my dear madam—great patience," said Dr. Wagtail with increasing solemnity, as he rubbed his nose against the gold-headed cane. "Indeed, so long as this nasty rheumatism hangs about us, we must keep to the brandy-and-water."

The physician knew very well that his words would cause the rheumatism to hang about the excellent lady for a considerable time,—indeed that she would be in no hurry to get rid of it, so long as he prescribed "the vile alcoholic beverage";—and he foresaw a goodly number of fees resulting from the judicious mode which he thus adopted of treating an ailment that did not exist.

"And now, my dear madam," he continued, "how is our tongue! Ah—not quite right yet! And how are our pulse?"

Then, as the case was pronounced to be important, the doctor lugged out an enormous gold stop-watch, and bent over it with a mysterious and even ominous expression of countenance as he felt the patient's pulse.

"Well, doctor—what do you think?" asked Mrs. Slingsby, looking as anxious and miserable as if she had been in the dock at the Old Bailey, about to hear the verdict of the jury.

"We must take care of ourselves, my dear madam—we must take care of ourselves," said the physician, shaking his head: "our pulse is not quite as it ought to be. How is our appetite? do we think we could manage a little slice of boiled fowl today? But we *must* try, my dear madam—we *must* try; and we must take a glass or two of wine—Port wine, of a good body. We must not reduce ourselves too low. And this evening, for supper, we must take gruel again—and the brandy-and-water as an indispensable medicine, afterwards."

"I will endeavour to follow your advice, my dear sir," said Mrs. Slingsby; "though heaven knows that the idea of the old Port wine at dinner—"

"Well, my dear madam—I know it is repugnant to you—very repugnant," interrupted the physician in a calmly remonstrative tone: "but the world cannot afford to lose so excellent a member of society as yourself. Consider your friends, my dear madam—exert yourself on their account. Triumph over these little aversions to wine and brandy—and

take them as medicines, in which sense do I offer them. And now, my dear madam, I will write you out a *little* prescription. You had better get it made up as usual at Timmins and Jakes, in Bond Street. I have no interest in recommending them, you know—not the slightest;—but I am sure their drugs *are* good, my dear madam."

Which was as much as to imply that the drugs of other chemists were *not* good; and we may here observe that the disinterested physician merely received a thousand a-year from Messrs. Timmins and Jakes for recommending all his patients to send his prescriptions to their shop.

The doctor wrote some professional hieroglyphics upon a slip of paper, and scrawled at the bottom something which would have represented the name of Snooks, or Brown, or Thompson, quite as well as it did Wagtail.

He then rose, received from Mrs. Slingsby his fee neatly wrapped up in a piece of tissue paper, and took his departure, holding his stick to his nose all the way down stairs.

The afternoon passed away somewhat tediously for Rosamond; and when dinner was placed on the table, Mrs. Slingsby contrived to do honour to the boiled fowls; and though she held forth at considerable length upon her abhorrence for Port wine, she managed to swallow four glasses of the generous juice in a manner which Rosamond considered highly creditable to her moral courage, seeing how much she detested it.

Shortly after dinner, which was served in the drawing-room, Sir Henry Court-enay made his appearance.

The baronet's eyes sparkled with delight when he beheld his intended victim at the pious lady's abode, and looking more sweetly beautiful—more divinely interesting than she had ever yet appeared to him. The blood boiled in his veins, as his glances rapidly swept her slight but symmetrical form, and as he thought within the recesses of his own iniquitous heart, "This night thou shalt become mine!"

It will be remembered that, during the last few days of her previous sojourn at Mrs. Slingsby's abode, Rosamond had been taught to form a very high opinion of the baronet; but the pious lady had not gone so far as to instil any voluptuous sentiment into the mind of the young maiden. Thus, when the baronet, on the occasion of his visits to Torrens Cottage, had addressed her in a somewhat equivocal manner, she did not comprehend him; and hence Sir Henry's reproach against Mrs. Slingsby, "that she was but an indifferent tutoress."

Still Rosamond was predisposed to admire the baronet's character, as it had been represented to her by Mrs. Slingsby; and she was by no means sorry that he had arrived to vary the monotony of the evening.

He exerted all his conversational powers to please her; and she could not conceal from herself the delight which she experienced in listening to those outpourings of a well-informed mind and a richly cultivated intellect.

The supper-hour arrived while she thought the evening was still young—so rapidly had the time passed away. Mrs. Slingsby partook of her gruel with as good a grace as she could possibly assume, but she ever and anon cast a longing glance towards the more substantial and succulent viands spread upon the board. The brandy-and-water was,



however, a consolation; and this the baronet, who mixed for her, made as strong as she could wish, and much stronger than Dr. Wagtail, were he really sincere in his advice, could have possibly intended her to take it.

Shortly before eleven the baronet rose and took his departure, Mrs. Slingsby ringing the drawing-room bell for the servant, to open the front door for him, with a ceremony the object of which was to let every one in the house know that he had departed, and the hour at which he went—in case of any exposure following the dread plot now in progress!

Mrs. Slingsby and Rosamond then remained in conversation for a few minutes, the topic being the excellent qualities of Sir Henry Courtenay.

“Rosamond, my love,” at length said Mrs. Slingsby, “before you retire to your own chamber, have the kindness to lock the side-board in the drawing-room and bring me the keys. For really servants are so neglectful—”

The beautiful girl departed with the alacrity of an obliging disposition to execute this little commission:—but the moment she had quitted the

drawing-room, Mrs. Slingsby emptied the dark contents of a very small phial into the only half-finished glass of Port wine which Rosamond had left.

The infamous woman then resumed her recumbent position upon the sofa; and—oh! the abominable mockery!—appeared to be occupied with her Bible, when the artless, innocent, and unsuspecting maiden returned to the room.

“Here are the keys, my dear maiden,” said Rosamond; “and every thing is safe down stairs. I shall now wish you a good night’s rest.”

“Finish your wine, my love, before you retire,” observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a softly persuasive tone: “I am not mean, but you know that I am averse to waste in any shape.”

Rosamond blushed at having merited the species of reproach thus conveyed, and drank the contents of her wine-glass: then, as it struck her that the flavour of the wine was somewhat less pleasant than it should be—but without attaching the least importance to the idea, and forgetting it altogether a moment afterwards—she ate a small piece of bread to take away the disagreeable taste.

"Good night, my dear madam," said the maiden, bending over the pious lady and kissing her cheek.

"Good night, Rosamond my love," returned Mrs. Slingsby. "I shall remain here for a quarter of an hour to perform my usual devotional exercises; and then I shall retire to my own chamber."

Rosamond withdrew, and sped to the room prepared for her.

She felt wearied, and made haste to lay aside her garments and arrange her hair. But in the midst of her occupation a sensation of deep drowsiness came over her; and she was glad to step into bed as speedily as possible—omitting, for perhaps the first time since her childhood, to kneel down first in prayer.

A minute afterwards—and she was sound asleep.

Three persons at that precise period had their minds filled with the image of Rosamond!

In the solitude of his chamber, at his lonely cottage, Mr. Torrens endured the torments of the damned,—mental torments, indescribably more severe than the most agonising of physical pain could possibly be.

Mercenary—selfish—cold—callous as he was, he could not stifle the still small voice of conscience, which told him he had done a flagrant—a vile—an awful deed, which would fill his cup with a bitterness, that no earthly pleasure, no mundane reward, could possibly counteract or change.

He felt that he was a monster in human shape: he was afraid to catch a glimpse of his own countenance in the glass—for when he once surveyed it rapidly, its workings were horrible to behold!

To sell his daughter for the filthy lucre which had tempted him!—It was horrible—atrocious!

And then,—then, at that very moment while he was pacing his chamber, the fell deed might be in consummation!

He walked to the window:—how black was the night—how menacing were those clouds that seemed laden with storm!

He started back with a look of horrified amazement: was there not some dreadful shape in the air?—assumed not those clouds the form of a tremendous being, with a countenance of lowering vengeance and awful threatenings?

No: it was fancy—and yet the temporary creation of that fancy was dreadful to behold,—as cloud piled on cloud, for an instant wore the semblance of a supernal, moving phantom, black and menacing with impending storm!

The guilty, wretched father clenched his fists—gnashed his teeth—knit his brows—and compressed his lips together to prevent his voice from suddenly shrieking forth in accents of heart-felt agony.

Having remained for about twenty minutes in the drawing-room, Mrs. Slingsby summoned her maid, by whose assistance she gained her own chamber—although she in reality no more required such aid than did the servant who afforded it.

The maid helped her mistress to divest herself of her clothing, and then retired.

And now Mrs. Slingsby, instead of seeking her couch—that couch which had been the scene of guilty pleasure, when Jacob Smith had lain concealed beneath it—seated herself in a large arm-chair, to wait until the house was quiet.

"I could wish that any thing rather than *this* was to take place!" she murmured two or three times. "Heaven only knows what will be the end of it! But Henry appears so confident of being able to appease her—so certain of reducing her even to the position of one who beseeches instead of menacing—that I am inclined to suppose he has well weighed all the difficulties of his task. At all events he has promised to spare me—to make me appear innocent! But will Rosamond be so deceived? No—no: she will view me with suspicion—her eyes will gradually open—And yet," thought Mrs. Slingsby, suddenly interrupting the current of her reflections, "she will be so completely in my power—at my mercy,—her honour will be in my hands—her reputation will depend on my secrecy—Oh! how I wish this night was past!" she cried passionately: "for the deed which is to mark it, is horrible to contemplate!"

And the third person whose mind was so full of the image of Rosamond Torrens, at the time when she lay down—beauteous and chaste virgin as she was—to rest beneath the roof of one whom, in her ingenuous confidence, she believed to be a pattern of female excellence and virtue,—that third person was Sir Henry Courtenay.

The baronet, on quitting Mrs. Slingsby's house, had returned home in his carriage, which was at the door ready to convey him thither; and, on entering his abode, he had immediately repaired to his own chamber.

Dispensing with the services of his valet, he sat down to pass away in voluptuous reflections the hour that must elapse before he could set forth again, to return to the dwelling of his mistress in Old Burlington Street.

He was of that age when the physical powers somewhat require the stimulus of an ardent and excited imagination; and he now began to gloat in anticipation of the joys which he promised himself to experience in the ruin of the hapless Rosamond.

Remorse and compunction touched him not—if he thought of the grief that was to ensue, it was merely because he re-arranged in his head all the details of the eloquent representations he must make to soothe that woe! Besides, his licentious imagination represented to him the beauteous Rosamond, more beauteous in her tears; and he had worked himself up to a pitch of such maddening desire, by the time it was necessary for him to sally forth, that he would not have resigned his expected prize—no, not if the ruin and disgrace of ten thousand families were to ensue.

Leaving his house stealthily, by a means of egress at the back, Sir Henry Courtenay hastened back to Old Burlington Street.

A few moments after he had reached the immediate vicinity of Mrs. Slingsby's residence, the clocks of the West-end churches proclaimed the hour of one.

That was the appointed time for his admission into the house.

Nor had he long to wait—for the front-door was soon opened noiselessly and cautiously, and by a person bearing no light: but the voice which whispered, "Is it you, Henry?" was that of Mrs. Slingsby.

And noiselessly and cautiously, too, she led the

way up stairs, he having previously put off his shoes, which he carried in his hand.

At the door of her own bed-room, Mrs. Slingsby made the baronet pause for an instant while she procured a taper; and as she handed it to him, and the light revealed their countenances to each other, they shrank from each other's gaze,—for human nature at that instant asserted its rightful empire, and while the woman recoiled with horror from the man who was about to commit an awful outrage on a member of her own sex, the man felt a momentary loathing for the woman who was aiding and abetting in the work of this foul night.

Mrs. Slingsby hurriedly pointed towards a door at the bottom of the passage, in the most retired part of the house; and she then retreated into her own room, a prey to feelings which a convict in Newgate need not have envied.

Meantime Sir Henry Courtenay had passed on to the extremity of the passage: and now his hand is upon the door.

He opens that door—he enters—he closes and fastens it behind him.

Advancing towards the bed, he holds the taper so that its light falls upon the pillow; and the soft, mellow lustre of the wax-candle reveals a charming countenance, with flushed cheeks and with rosy lips apart.

For Rosamond's slumber is uneasy, though profound,—doubtless the effect of laudanum upon the nerves of one so entirely unaccustomed to its use, and who has imbibed so large a dose!

And one of those flushed cheeks reposed on a round, full, and naked arm, like a red rose-leaf upon Parian marble;—and the other arm was thrown over the bed-clothes, which had been somewhat disturbed by the uneasiness of the maiden's sleep, and left exposed the polished shoulders of dazzling whiteness and the bosom of virgin rotundity and plumpness.

Oh! what a charming picture was thus revealed to the eyes of the lustful miscreant, whose desires were increased to almost raging madness by the spectacle!

He placed the taper on the mantel, and hastened to lay aside—nay, almost to tear off his garments; and in less than three minutes he was lying by the side of the young virgin.

But scarcely had his rude hand invaded the treasures of her bosom, when she awoke with a faint scream and a sudden start—the result of some disagreeable dream; and then the baronet clasped her with all the fury of licentiousness in his arms.

A few moments elapsed ere she was aroused sufficiently to comprehend the dreadful—the horrible truth; but when the torpor produced by the laudanum had somewhat subsided, she became a prey to the most frightful alarms, produced by the conviction that some one had invaded the sanctity of her couch—and a glance showed her the features of Sir Henry Courtenay.

She would have given vent to her anguish and her horror in appalling screams: but he placed his hand over her mouth—he muttered fearful menaces in her ears—he called God to witness his resolution to possess her; and, though she became bewildered and dismayed—though her brain whirled, and her reason seemed to be deserting her—yet she battled with the ravisher—she maintained a desperate, an awful struggle,—and so unrelenting was the vio-

lence which he used to restrain and overpower her, that murder would have perhaps been done, had not the poor victim become insensible in his arms!

And then her ruin was accomplished.

Oh! ye clouds, laden with storm, why gave ye not forth your forked lightnings—why sent ye not abroad your thunders—to smite the hero of that foul night?

For, oh! while the father was still pacing his chamber in his own dwelling, the hell that raged in his breast defying all hope of slumber,—while, too, the no less infamous woman who had pandered to this work of ruin, was trembling rather for what might be the consequences than for the deed itself,—there, in that room to which Rosamond had retired in the pride of innocence and chastity—there was she despoiled—there became she the victim of the miscreant ravisher!

"Release me—let me depart—let me fly!" implored the wretched Rosamond, in a tone so subdued with anguish and with weakness, that there was no fear of its alarming the house.

"Rosamond, hear me—I beseech you!" exclaimed the baronet, as he held her by the arms in such a manner that she could not escape from the bed. "Hear reason, if you can! What would you do? Whither can you fly? The past cannot be recalled; but there is much to think of for the future. The occurrence of this night is a secret known only to yourself and to me: your dishonour need never transpire to the world?"

"Oh! my God! my God!" murmured Rosamond, in a tone of ineffable anguish: "my dishonour!—my dishonour!"

And she repeated the word—the terrible word, in so thrilling, penetrating, and yet subdued a voice, that even the remorseless baronet was for a moment touched.

"O Rosamond!" he said, in a hurried and excited manner; "do not repine so bitterly for what cannot be recalled! Think how I love you, dearest one—remember that my passion for thee amounted to a frenzy,—and it was in frenzy that I acted thus. Instead of loathing me—"

"No—no, I do not loathe you!—my God—no!" said Rosamond, becoming the least degree calmer. "I now perceive how dependant I am upon you—how necessary it is that your love should console me! But my dear father—should he learn his daughter's disgrace—Oh! heaven, have mercy upon me!"

And she once more burst into an agony of weeping.

"Rosamond—Rosamond, compose yourself!" said Sir Henry Courtenay, with that tenderness of tone which he so well knew how to assume, and on which he had so much relied as an emollient means to be applied to soothe the grief of the victim of his desires. "Shall I repeat how deeply I love thee—how ardently I adore thee? Oh! my best beloved, do not thus abandon yourself to the wildness of a vain and useless despair!"

"But have I not been made the victim of a dreadful conspiracy?" said Rosamond; "was I not inveigled hither to be ruined? Oh! I will fly—I will fly—I will hasten home to my father—I will throw myself at his feet and tell him all—and he will pardon and avenge me!"

Again she endeavoured to spring from the bed; but Sir Henry Courtenay held her back—and, through sheer exhaustion, she fell weeping on his breast.

Then the task of consoling her—or rather of somewhat moderating the excess of her anguish, became more easy; and the baronet reasoned and vowed—argued and protested—and pleaded for pardon so touchingly and with so much apparent contrition, that Rosamond began to believe there was indeed some extenuation for one who loved her so passionately, and who had been led away by the frenzy of those feelings of which she was the object.

"Oh! why, my adored girl, are you so beautiful?" murmured the baronet: "rather attribute my crime to the influence—the irresistible influence of thine own charms, than to any deeply-seated wickedness on my part! I should have become raving mad for love of thee, had not the fury of my passion hurried me on to that point, when, reckless of all consequences, I had recourse to this stratagem. I know that my conduct is horrible—that it is vile and base in the extreme;—but I sue to thee for pardon,—I, so proud and haughty—yes, I implore thee, my darling Rosamond, to forgive me! And, oh! if all the remainder of my life, devoted to thine happiness, can atone for my turpitude of this night,—if the most unwearied affection—the most tender love can impart consolation to thee, my angel—then wilt thou yet smile upon me, and the past shall be forgotten."

"Then you will make me your wife?" murmured Rosamond.

"Yes, sweet girl—thou shalt become mine—mine in the sight of heaven!" said the baronet, who would have made any pledge at that moment, in order to solace and re-assure his victim.

"But wherefore not have told me that you loved me—why not have demanded my hand of my father, and have married me as Clarence did my sister?" asked Rosamond, a doubt striking to her heart's core.

"I said many things to make you understand how dear you were to me," answered the baronet; "and you did not comprehend my meaning. Remember you not that, one day when I called at your father's house, I met you alone in the parlour; and as you offered me your hand, I said, '*Happy will the man be on whom this fair hand shall be bestowed*.' And on another occasion, when you and I were again alone together, the conversation happened to turn upon death, and I remarked that '*it was dreadful to contemplate the idea of dying, but that I could lay down my life to serve you*.'"

"Oh! yes—I remember now!" murmured Rosamond. "And I even thought of those observations after you were gone; and they seemed to afford me pleasure to ponder upon them."

"Do you not now understand, then, dearest angel, how disappointment at finding that I was not at once comprehended, drove me to despair?" said the wily baronet. "Can you not pardon me, if—thus driven to desperation—I vowed to possess you—to make you mine—so that you would be compelled to accept my hand, as you already reigned undisputed mistress over my heart?"

"If you will fulfil your solemn promise to make me your wife, I shall yet be happy—and this dreadful night may be forgotten. No—not forgotten,"

continued Rosamond, hastily; "because the memory is immortal for such hours of anguish as these! But you will, at least, make all the atonement that lies in your power—and I may yet look the world in the face!"

"Rosamond—my sweet Rosamond, within a month from this time thou shalt be my wife!" said the baronet.

"With that assurance I must console myself," returned the still weeping girl. "And now, I adjure you—by the solemnity of the pledge which you have made me, and which I believe—I implore, you, by that love which you declare you entertain for me,—to leave me this moment!"

The baronet was fearful of reviving the storm of grief which his peridious language had succeeded in quelling; and he accordingly rose and resumed his apparel.

Not a word was spoken during the two or three minutes which thus passed; and when Sir Henry was once more dressed, he approached the ruined girl, saying, "One embrace, Rosamond, and I leave thee till the morrow."

"One word ere we part," she said, in a hurried and almost hollow tone: "does Mrs. Slingsby know—But surely, surely, she could not have lent herself—And yet," added the bewildered Rosamond, a second time interrupting herself abruptly, "how could you have gained admittance into the house, and in the middle of the night? Oh! heavens, the most fearful suspicions—"

"Calm yourself—compose your feelings, dearest," said the baronet. "Mrs. Slingsby knows that I adore you—is aware that I love you: because the long acquaintance—indeed the sincere friendship which exists between us—prevents me from having any secrets unrevealed to her. But wrong not that amiable, that excellent, that pure-minded woman, by unjust suspicions! I entered her house like a thief—by means of a window accidentally left unfastened; and in the same manner must I escape now. Not for worlds would I have her suspect the occurrences of this night! Therefore, my angel, compose yourself, so that your appearance may not engender any suspicion in her mind when you meet at the breakfast table in the morning:—for, remember, my Rosamond, you will shortly become my wife,—and then, as you yourself observed, you will be enabled to look the world in the face!"

"And until that moment comes," said Rosamond, with a deep sob, "I shall blush and be compelled to cast down my eyes in the presence of every one who knows me. Oh! my God—what cruel fears—what dread thoughts oppress me! And my sister is doubtless so happy! Heaven grant that she may never know the anguish which wrings my heart at this moment!"

"By every thing sacred, I conjure you to compose yourself, Rosamond," exclaimed Sir Henry Courtenay, now afraid to leave her, lest in the dread excitement which was reanimating her, she might lay violent hands upon herself:—for, by the light of the taper, he could perceive that her countenance was ashy pale, and that while she was uttering those last words relative to her sister, her features were suddenly distorted by an expression of intense mental agony.

"Compose myself! Oh! how can I compose myself?" she exclaimed; and then she burst into a torrent of tears.

The baronet knew the female heart too well not to allow her to give full vent to the pearly tide of anguish; and three or four minutes elapsed,—he standing by the bed, contemplating with but little emotion, unless, indeed, it were of lust, the beautiful being whom he had so ruthlessly ruined,—and she burying her face in her hands, the tears trickling between her fingers, and her agonising sobs alone breaking the solemn stillness of the night.

Sir Henry Courtenay waited until the violence of this renewed outburst of ineffable woe had somewhat abated; and then he again endeavoured to console the unhappy victim of his foul desires—the ruined sufferer by his hellish turpitude!

And Rosamond had so much need of solace, and was so dependent on hope for the future to enable her to sustain the almost crushing misery of the present, that she threw herself upon his honour—his mercy—his deceitful promises; and she even smiled—but faintly—oh! very faintly—when he again employed his infernal sophistry to prove the deed of that dread night to be the surest testimony to his ardent love.

At length she was sufficiently composed to induce him to take his departure; and, like a vile snake as he was in heart, he crept away from the chamber of the deflowered—the ravished girl.

As he stole thus stealthily along the passage, he observed a light streaming from Mrs. Slingsby's room, the door of which had been purposely left ajar.

He entered, and found his accomplice still up; nor had the abandoned woman felt the least inclination to retire to rest.

For her mind had been a prey to the most terrible alarms, from the moment when the baronet had first set foot in Rosamond's chamber.

"I have succeeded—and she will not proclaim the outrage to the world," said Sir Henry Courtenay, in a low tone. "I have, moreover, kept my word with you, and have made her believe that you are innocent of any share in the proceeding."

Mrs. Slingsby gave no answer, but bit her under lip forcibly—for vile as she herself was, she could hardly prevent herself from exclaiming to her companion, "You are a black-hearted monster!"

Sir Henry did not, however, notice that she was influenced by any emotion hostile to him; or if he did, he cared not to show that he perceived it;—but, wishing his mistress "good night," he quitted the room, and stole out of the house.

CHAPTER LXIX.

MISERY AND VICE.

A WEEK had elapsed since the perpetration of the atrocity described in the preceding chapter.

The scene changes to a miserable garret in one of the foul courts leading out of King Street, St. Giles's.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening; and the rain pattered on the roof and against the little window of the wretched room, which, small as it was, was scarcely lighted by the candle that flickered with the draught gushing in from beneath the door.

On a mean and sordid mattress stretched upon the floor, and with but a thin and torn blanket to

cover him, lay a man who was not in reality above five-and-twenty, but who seemed nearly double that age—so ghastly was his countenance, and so attenuated was his form with sickness and want.

Near him a young female—almost a mere girl—was seated on a broken chair. Her apparel was mean, and so scanty that she shivered with the cold, and though the traces of famine and care were plainly visible upon her features, yet they had not carried then ravages so far as to efface the prettiness which naturally characterised the composition of that countenance.

Beautiful she was not, nor ever had been, but good-looking she decidedly was;—and though attired almost in rags, and with an expression of profound misery upon her face, there was something interesting in the appearance of that poor creature.

The reader will remember that, in the earlier chapters of this tale, we introduced him to one of those dens of iniquity called low lodging-houses, in Castle Street, Long Acre; and he will also recollect that a mock marriage took place in that "padding-ken," between a thief, called Josh Pedler, and a poor labourer's daughter, named Matilda Briggs.

The man lying on the mattress in the garret, was Josh Pedler; and the girl sitting near him, was Matilda Briggs.

"Well, now," suddenly exclaimed Pedler, as he raised himself with difficulty to a sitting posture, "what do you say in answer to my last question? are we to die of starvation? or are we to have bread by some means or another?"

Matilda burst into tears, and wrung her hands bitterly.

"Don't sit whimpering there, damn your eyes!" cried the ruffian. "Blubbering won't do no good—and you know that as well as me. Here have I been on my beam-ends, as one may say, for the last three weeks, and unable to go about to pick up a single farthing—the landlord swears he will have some money to-morrow morning—all the things is pawned—and here am I only wanting a little proper nourishment to set me on my legs again; but that I can't get."

"God knows I have starved myself to give you all I could, Josh," said Matilda, her voice broken with frequent and agonising sobs. "When you have asked me if I had kept enough meat or bread for myself, I always answered yes; and I turned my back towards you that you might 'nt see how much—or rather how little I had kept back. But what can I do? My father and mother are gone back into the country to throw themselves on their parish—I have no friends to apply to—and you's seem unable to assist you at present."

"Something must be done, Tilda," said the man. "We can't starve—we must do any thing rather than that. I am as hungry as the very devil now—and I know that if I had a good steak and some porter, it would put me all right again."

"But, my God! we have not even the means to buy a penny roll!" almost shrieked the young woman. "There isn't a thing left to pawn. I have nothing but this old gown on my back—every thing else has gone—gone!" she added hysterically, as she threw a wild glance around the naked and dismantled garret. "How cold it is, too! What can we do? what can we do?"

And she rocked herself to and fro in a manner denoting an utter despair.

"You keep asking what can be done," said Josh Pedler, brutally, "and yet you know all the time that there's only one thing to be done, and that it must come to *that* at last."

Matilda started, and turned a glance of horrified amazement upon her companion.

"Well—so I suppose you understand what I mean," continued the ruffian; "and, therefore, there's no use in gammoning about it no longer. We're starving, and there's the rent to pay: that's one side of the question. You're a good-looking young o'man, and can do as other vimen do: that's t'other side of the question."

"Oh! Josh—and would you have me become a prostitute?" shrieked Matilda, in a tone of mingled horror and reproach.

"Come—none of your nonsense, my lady," said Josh Pedler; "or I shall precious soon know how to settle your hash. Either go and earn some tin, or cut your lucky altogether. If I starve, I'll starve by myself—"

"My God! I will not abandon you!" murmured the unhappy young creature, terrified by this menace of separation from one to whom she had grown greatly attached. "No—I cannot—I will not leave you, Josh: and yet—"

"Let's have no more of this humbug, Tilda!" exclaimed the man, brutally. "Leave off whimpering—or, ill as I am, I'll give you something worth crying for. Come, put on your bonnet and tramp; or, by hell—"

"Oh! you could not—you would not do me a mischief!" she cried, clasping her hands together. "And if I obey you now, in what you have ordered me to do, shall you not hate and detest me ever afterwards?"

"Not a bit of it," returned Josh Pedler, softening a little as he perceived that his point was already well nigh gained: for the poor young woman found powerful incentives to yield to the commands of the ruffian—she herself being almost famished. "Not a bit of it!" he repeated. "You ought to have turned out when I was first taken ill; and then if I'd had common necessities I should have got well by this time. So be a good girl, and see if you can't bring back something good to eat and drink, and a trifle to pay the landlord."

With a bursting heart, Matilda rose from her seat, and put on her bonnet and her scanty shawl—a poor rag which the pawnbroker had refused to advance a single penny upon.

"Give us a kiss afore you go, old gal," said Josh Pedler, by way of affording her some encouragement to begin the frightful course of prostitution to which he strove to urge her.

She bent down, and pressed her lips upon his forehead, murmuring, "Are you sure that you will not loathe me *afterwards*?"

"Don't have any more of that gammon, Tilda," he cried; "but cut along—or else I shall be tempted to bite a piece out of your face, I'm so thundering hungry."

Matilda shuddered from head to foot, and rushed from the room.

As she was about to quit the house, a door in the passage opened, and a stout ill-looking fellow, without a coat, and smoking a short pipe, came forth, exclaiming, "Ah! I know'd it was you by your sneaking step. Now I tell you what it is, Mrs. Pedler—if so be I don't have my rent, or a good

part on't to-night, you and your man must tramp before I shuts up. I've got people as will be glad to have a airy and comfortable room like your'n and as will pay; leastways I'll get rid of *you*."

Matilda stayed to hear no more, but rushed wildly from the house, the threat of the landlord ringing like the knell of hope in her ears.

She observed not which direction she was pursuing;—she saw not the passengers who jostled her on either side—her eyes were open—and yet the surrounding and the passing objects formed only one vast void—one tremendous blank to her.

Her pace was hurried, like that of a person intent on some important mission, and having some defined and positive end in view:—and yet she had even forgotten the motive that had sent her forth into the streets that evening, to dare the cold wind and face the pattering rain,—she who had but so scanty a clothing to protect her!

There was a humming noise in her ears: but she could not discriminate the sounds of voices from the roll of carriages;—and even when she crossed a street, it was through no caution exercised on her part that she was not run over.

At last her ideas began to assume a more settled shape; and her thoughts, rescuing themselves as it were from utter confusion, settled gradually down into their proper cells in the brain—the racking brain which held them!

She walked slower, and with more apparent uncertainty of aim; objects assumed a defined shape to her eyes; and her ears recognised the various sounds which raised the echoes of the streets.

At length she stood still in the midst of Holborn, and tears burst from her eyes; for she now remembered that she was there—there, in the wide and open thoroughfare—to commence the dread avocation of a prostitute!

She shuddered from head to foot—but with no ordinary tremor: it was a convulsion which began at the very heart, and vibrated with electric rapidity and spasmodic violence throughout the entire form.

"Now then, young woman—out o' the way!" cried a porter carrying a huge load upon his head.

And, like a startled deer, Matilda hurried along.

She glanced to the left and to the right, and beheld magnificent shops teeming with merchandise, and crowded with purchasers:—she lingered in front of the pastry-cooks' establishments;—and she stopped to devour with her eyes the smoking joints, the piles of vegetables, and the large tins full of pudding, in the windows of the eating-houses!

But she knew it was useless to implore a meal;—and moreover it was something beyond food that she required,—for money to pay her heartless landlord she must have!

She resumed her mournful, melancholy walk, now slow in pace and drooping in gait.

Time was wearing on—nine o'clock would soon strike—and if she were ever to take the first step in a loathsome trade, now was the moment!

Think not, reader, that because this young woman had become the mistress of a thief, and had passed through all the training of a low lodging-house and several weeks of misery and want,—think not that she was prepared to rush at once and in a moment on a career of public prostitution! No: she was attached to her lover, in the first place;—and secondly, she was no brazen-faced slut, whose mind

had derived coarseness from intemperance, or callousness from ill-treatment.

She shrank from the path which alone seemed open to her: she recoiled from the ways into which a stern necessity commanded her to enter.

While she was endeavouring to subdue the bitterness of the reflections which crowded upon her soul, a young woman, scarcely a year older than herself, accosted her, and said, "My dear, are you come on this beat to be one of us?"

Matilda saw by a glance that the female was one of the lowest class of prostitutes; and she burst into tears.

"Oh! then, you *are* come out for that purpose!" exclaimed the other. "Well, you must pay your footing at all events;"—and making a signal to several of her friends who stood at a short distance, she cried, "Here's a precious lark! a gal which wants to be one of us, and is blubbering at it!"

Matilda was now surrounded by loose women, who vowed that she should treat them, or they would tear her eyes out.

Vainly did she protest that she had no money: tears and remonstrances were of no avail; and the prostitutes were growing more clamorous,—for, it must be remembered, there were no New Police in those days,—when an old man, decently dressed, but horribly ugly, stopped near the group and asked what was the matter.

"Here's a young gal which wants to go upon the town, and can't pay her footing," explained one of the loose women; "and so she shan't come on our beat."

"Come, come," said the old man; "don't tease the poor thing! Which is she? Oh! rather good-looking. Well, my dears—here's half-a-crown for you to get something to drink—and I'll get the young woman to take a little walk along with me."

Thus speaking, the old man handed the coin to the girl who had given him the above recorded explanation; and she and her friends were too much rejoiced at the receipt of this unexpected donation, to trouble themselves further concerning Matilda Briggs.

When the loose women had disappeared, the old man turned towards Matilda, and said, "Take my arm, my dear; and I'll conduct you to a nice place where we can have a chat together for half an hour or so; and I'll make you a present of half-a-guinea before we part."

The unfortunate girl obeyed in silence; but not quite mechanically:—gratitude for the seasonable assistance she had received from the old man, and the idea of obtaining enough money not only to buy food but also liquidate the greater portion of the arrears of rent due to the merciless landlord, were powerful motives to stifle compunctions feelings in her breast.

The old man was one of those sexagenarian voluptuaries who dishonour gray hairs—one of those hoary sinners who prowl about the streets after dusk, to pick up girls of tender age, and who seldom choose females of ripe years. Under ordinary circumstances this old man would not have bestowed the slightest notice upon Matilda; because she was between fifteen and sixteen, and he affected children of eleven and twelve. But the incident which had brought them together had given him a sudden zest for novelty; and thus the gray-headed reprobate, who was old enough to be Matilda's great grand-

father, tucked her under his arm and led her off to the nearest brothel with which he was acquainted.

It was eleven o'clock when the door of the garret in which Josh Pedlar was lying, opened abruptly, and Matilda made her appearance.

"Well, what news?" demanded the man anxiously. "You're left me long enough—"

"I could not return sooner," answered the young woman, in a hoarse and strangely altered tone. "But sit up and eat your fill, Josh—for here is a good plate of meat—"

"And the landlord?" interrupted the thief joyfully.

"Is paid every farthing. I have earned a sovereign by yielding to the hideous embraces of an old man," she added in a tone expressive of deep and concentrated emotion,—“an old man whose touch was horrible as the pawings of an imp or some filthy monster. But he gave me double what he first promised; and now you may eat—if you can,” she exclaimed, with a hysterical laugh.

"And you will sit down and eat with me, Tilda," said the thief in a coaxing tone—for he now saw that his mistress might become serviceable to him, and he was anxious to conciliate her.

"No—not a morsel," she replied impatiently. "I am not hungry—*now*: besides, even if I was, it would seem to me that I was eating my own flesh and blood. But I have got some spirits in a bottle, Josh—and I can drink a drop with you."

"I thought you didn't like spirits, Tilda?" observed the man, contemplating with some degree of alarm her pale countenance on which there appeared an expression of settled despair.

"Oh!" I dare say I shall like spirits well enough now!" she said. "At all events I feel an inclination for them to-night. But, come—sit up and eat."

Thus speaking, she spread open a large brown-paper parcel before the thief, whose eyes sparkled when he beheld a quantity of slices of recently cooked meat, a loaf of bread, and some cheese.

Forgetting how the viands were procured, Josh Pedlar began to devour them with the voracity of one who had fasted a long time; and Matilda hastened to fetch him some beer.

When she returned, she sat down, and drank two glasses of raw gin, with but a few moments' interval between the drams; and then, bursting out into a hysterical laugh, she said, "Blue run is capital stuff! I feel myself fit for any thing now!"

"That's right, old gal—cheer up!" exclaimed Josh Pedlar. "Take another glass—and then you'll be able to eat a bit of this meat."

"Well—perhaps I may," cried Matilda. "I was tipsy when you and me were married by the old parson in the padding-ken; and I'll be tipsy to night, as it's the first of a new period of my life."

"Damn it! you are coming out strong, Tilda!" ejaculated Josh Pedlar. "*Blue run—padding-ken—* why, I never heard you patter flash before."

"Oh! you don't know what you may see me do yet," said the young woman, in a voice indicative of unnatural excitement. "And what does it matter? Perhaps you'll hear me cursing and swearing tomorrow! Any thing—any thing," she added, her voice changing to a tone of deep, intense feeling,—“any thing, so long as one can only grow hardened!"

And having tossed off a third glass of liquor, she

accepted and ate the portion of food that Josh Pedler handed to her—although but a few minutes before she recoiled from it, as if it were her own flesh and blood!

"Now you are acting like a sensible woman," said Josh; "and you make me feel more comfortable. But when you first come in, I couldn't make out what the devil possessed you: you looked all queer like—just as if you was going to commit suicide."

"Suicide!—ha! ha!" laughed Matilda strangely. "Well—I did think of it as I was coming home; but I remembered that you was here—hungry—starving—and too ill to get up and shift for yourself. So I came back, Josh. But won't you have some gin? You don't know what good it does one. If I had only taken some before I went out just now—that is, if I had had the money to buy it—I shouldn't have gone whimpering along the street as I did. No wonder all the poor girls who walk the pavement drink so much gin. I am already quite another person. I do declare that I could sing. But here comes some one up the stairs: it can't be for us."

"Yes, it is though," said Josh Pedler, as the heavy steps of a man halted at the door, to which a fist was applied by no means lightly. "Come in!"

The visitor obeyed this invitation without farther ceremony; and the moment Josh caught sight of his countenance, he cried joyfully, "Tim the Snammer!"

CHAPTER LXX.

TIM THE SNAMMER.

THE individual who rejoiced in the name of *Tim the Snammer*, was a tall, athletic, well-built man of about thirty-two, and tolerably good-looking. His attire consisted of a shabby bottle-green surtout, a dark waistcoat, and drab trousers; and he wore his hat very far down on his head—probably because it was too large for him, his hair being particularly short, all his superfluous curls having fallen beneath the unsparing scissors of a gaol-barber.

"Hoiloa! Josh, my boy!" cried Tim, as he closed the door behind him. "Why, you are taking it cozie there in bed."

"I have been desperate bad, Tim," was the answer; "or I shouldn't lie quiet in such a damned empty garret as this here, you may take your davy. But when did you get out?"

"My time was up to-day at eleven o'clock," returned Tim. "I called at the old crib in Castle Street—Thompson's, twenty-three, and stayed with Mutton-Face till now. She told me you'd been ill, and also where I should find you. So I've come round to see you, old feller—and, may be, arrange a little job that I've got in my head. But since you're unable to get up—"

"Tim, my boy," interrupted Josh, "I've just had a deuced good supper, and I'm sure of a breakfast and a dinner too, and may be a supper also, to-morrow; and if I ain't well with all that in two days' time, my name is n't Pedler. So, if you've got any thing that'll keep so long, do let me be in it. Matilda, my dear, this is my friend Mr. Timothy Splint, generally knowned as Tim the Snammer: and Tim, this young o'man is my jomen. We was re-

gularly spliced at the padding-ken by old Barlow; and she's staunch to the backbone. So now you're acquainted with each other; and you needn't be afraid, Tim, of talking secrets. But how goes the gin, Tilda?"

"There's plenty left—and I borrowed two glasses of the landlord as I came up," answered the young woman: "so here's one for Mr. Splint."

"Call me Tim, my dear," said that individual. "We have no *misters* and *missusses* among us. Here's your health, Tilda, then—since that's your name: here's to ye, Josh."

"Thank'ee. But what plan is it that you've got in your head?" asked Pedler.

"I'll tell you in a brace of shakes," returned Splint, smacking his lips in approval of the dram which he had just imbibed. "You may very well suppose that I've no great reason to be pleased with the conduct of that scoundrel Old Death."

"The damned thief!" cried Josh. "He sacked the sixteen pounds, and then never made a move to help you when you was had up again afore the beak."

"No thanks to him that I wasn't transported," said Tim Splint, with a fierce expression of countenance. "The priggging wasn't proved very clearly, and so I got off with two months at the mill as a rogue and vagabond. But, by hell! I'll have my revenge on the bliking old scoundrel that humbugged you and Mutton-Face Sal. And what's more, I know how to go to work, too."

"What do you mean, Tim?" demanded Josh Pedler.

"Why, I mean this—that Mutton-Face knows where Old Death is hanging-out," responded the Snammer. "She saw him last night in the Borough; and she dogged him into some crib. This was about eight o'clock. Well, she was determined to see whether he lived there, or not—and she was afraid of raising suspicion and alarming him by making any inquiries: so she watched near the place for a matter of three hours, and he didn't come out. So it's pretty clear he does live there. But to make all sure, Mutton-Face has gone over there again to-night; and she'll watch to see when he comes in, if he does at all—and then she'll stay to see whether he comes out again. If it's all right, you and me will just pay a visit to Old Death; and I'll be bound we shall find something worth the trouble of going for."

"Old Death always has money about him," observed Josh; "and I should think that there's no one wants blunt more than you and me, Tim, at this moment."

"I have n't a blessed mag," returned Splint. "If it was n't for Mutton-Face Sal, I should n't have had a dinner to eat, when I got out of quod this morning, till I'd prigged the money to pay for one. And after all I've spent in Thompson's padding kens, I couldn't get a lodging there for love, I know. But Sal has managed to keep herself while I've been lumbered; and now I must begin to keep her again. She's got just enough to carry us on till either this business of Old Death or some thing else turns up—and that's all I care about."

"Well," said Josh Pedler, "I hope I shall be able to get up in two or three days; and then I'm your man for any thing you like. But, I say, Tim, what a life this is of our'n, to be sure!"

"You don't mean to say you're a-tired on it—do you?" cried Splint, with a species of anxiety and



almost convulsive shudder, proving that a truth of an unwelcome nature, and to which he never liked to be awakened, was suddenly recalled to his contemplation.

"By God! I wish I could turn honest man, Tim!" exclaimed Pedler, with unmistakable sincerity. "It's all very well while the excitement of drinking or *business* goes on; but it's when one is lumbered in bed, as I've been for some weeks, that one feels queer and qualmish, Tim. That's why I always hate to have the least thing the matter with me. I can't a-bear to have time to brew and mope over things. I wish there wasn't no such thing as *thought*, Tim."

"Blest if I didn't often say so to myself when I was cooped up in that cursed prison, Josh!" exclaimed the Snammer. "I tell you what it is. People say we're regularly depraved—that's the word, Josh—and so they invent treadmills and all them kind of things. But it's quite enow for chaps like us to be left alone with our own thoughts—and there's no denying it. Now my idear is jist this:—Put a man like us into gaol, if you will, and don't torture him with hard labour; but let him have time to *think*. Then,

when he comes out, say to him, '*Here's work for you, and a chance to get an honest living.*' My opinion is that nine out of ten would swail themselves of the offer. But suppose only one or two did it—why, it must be a blessin' to society to reduce the number of them as preys upon it. What do you think, Josh?"

"I can't a-bear to think about it, Tim," returned the invalid thief. "Now, then, Tilda—what the hell are you piping your eyes for? I s'pose you think my friend is a Methodist parson? But he ain't though—and don't mean to be. Damnation! Tilda, leave off blubbering like that—and hand round the gin. There—that's a good girl. Blue rum is the mortal enemy of unpleasant thinking—and that's why we all takes to it as nat'ral as one does to opium when he's accustomed to it."

"I've often thought, Josh," said Tim Splint, after draining the glass which Matilda handed him, "that I should like to go over to America, and bury myself in the backwoods that you hear talked of or read about. I wish I had a chance! And, raly, if we do get a good haul from Old Death, I think I shall try the game. For, arter all—and you and me

may say it between ourselves in this here room, 'cause Matilda, being a o'man, goes for no one,—but, arter all, there's few on us that would n't give up priggish if we could. I wonder why they don't establish societies to reclaim and provide for men-thieves, as they do for unfortunat vimen. Blowed if I would n't go into such a place in a minute!"

"And do you mean to say," exclaimed Matilda, wiping her eyes, and speaking with strange energy, "that if you choose to leave off this kind of life, you can't? Why, you'd be happier, Josh, as a labourer with only twelve or fifteen shillings a week, than you are now;—for I never heard so much from your lips as I have to-night."

"Who the devil will employ people without characters?" demanded Josh Pedler. "Do you think that if you tried to get a place even as a scullion in a gentleman's family, you could obtain it? No such a thing. Lord bless your dear heart! them as talks most about the depravity of the lower classes, is always the last to give us a chance."

"Yes;—and yet we wasn't all nat'rally wicked," said Tim the Snammer. "Some on us was made so by circumstances; and that was the case with me."

"How came that about?" asked Josh Pedler, who, being in no humour to sleep, was well disposed for conversation.

"Yes;—how came that about?" inquired Matilda, feeling interested in the present topic.

"You do n't mean to say you would like to hear me tell my story, do you?" exclaimed Tim.

"I should, by all means," answered Josh Pedler.

"And I too—Oh! above all things!" cried Matilda: "particularly, if you can show—what you said," she added hesitatingly.

"You mean to say, if I can prove that I did n't become what I am through my own fault?" observed the Snammer. "Well—I think I *can* prove it. But you shall judge for yourselves. So, here goes."

And, with this free-and-easy kind of preface, the thief commenced his narrative, which we have expurgated of those grammatical solecisms and characteristic redundancies which, if preserved, would only mar the interest and obscure the sense. At the same time, we have kept as nearly to the original mode of delivery as possible.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE HISTORY OF TIM THE SNAMMER.

My father was a small farmer in Hampshire. He had about thirty-six acres of his own, all well cultivated and well stocked, and free of all mortgage and encumbrance of that kind. The farm was small enough, God knows; but it yielded a decent living,—for my father was as industrious as a bee,—always out by sunrise,—and my mother was as saving, thrifty, and prudent a housewife as any in the county. They were not, however, mean: no—very far from that. The beggar was never turned away unassisted from their door; and if a neighbour got a little behind-hand with his rent, and deserved aid, it was ten to one if the china tea-pot in my mother's cupboard did not contain a few

pounds, which were speedily placed at his disposal. Farmer Splint, as my father was called, was always regular in his attendance at the village church on Sunday; and the only person who looked upon him as a mean-spirited fellow, was the landlord of the ale-house—because my father so seldom entered the *George and Dragon* even to take a glass of beer at the bar,—and never stopped there to pass an evening.

"My mother was a very handsome woman, and had been the village-belle before her marriage with Farmer Splint. This marriage was one of affection on both sides; for though my mother's parents were very poor and unable to give their daughter any thing, yet Farmer Splint preferred her to the wealthier young women of the neighbourhood. On her side, though my father was nearly ten years older than herself, she refused the offer of a rich young farmer, and became the spouse of a man whom she could respect and esteem as well as love. The fruits of this marriage were two children,—a daughter, named Marion, and myself. Our mother found time, even amongst the numerous duties and cares of the household, to teach us to read and write. The village schoolmaster then taught us a little arithmetic, history, and geography; and we were as well instructed as the children of poor parents were likely to be, and much better than those of even many richer people living in our neighbourhood.

"Now, from all I have just told you, you will see plain enough that our mother and father were good, honest, moral, and well-intentioned people. Their only care was to toil with all possible diligence, to make both ends meet,—put by a little savings, when the harvest was very plentiful,—and bring up their children in a respectable and decent manner. My father was particularly anxious to prevent his boy from resembling the young blackguards of the village: he would never let me play about in the high road at marbles,—nor yet go bird's-nesting, which he said encouraged cruelty, and was also the first step to poaching. But he did all he could to render me hardy, and promoted innocent sports of an athletic nature. Altogether, farmer Splint's family was considered to be the best-behaved and the happiest in all the county.

"It was in the year 1807, that my history now dates from. I was then thirteen years old: my sister, Marion, was eighteen, and a sweet beautiful girl she was, with fine blue eyes, flaxen hair, and a figure that could 'nt have been made more graceful if clothed in silk or satin. She was at that time engaged to be married to the only son of a farmer in the neighbourhood, and who was well to do in the world. A finer fellow than young George Dalton you would never wish to see; and when he and Marion walked to church arm-in-arm, on a Sunday, every one noticed them, as much as to express a conviction of the fitness of the intended union of such a handsome, manly youth, and such a modest pretty girl. Well, it was the summer of 1807, and the marriage was to take place in October, when all the harvest was got in, and the good ale was brewed for the ensuing year. Every thing appeared gay and smiling for the young people; for George's father had promised to give up his farm to his son, but to continue to live in the house, as soon as Marion should have become his daughter-in-law.

"About three miles from our farm stood the cautious seat of Squire Bulkeley. This gentleman had been left an orphan when young; and his estates were managed by his guardians, until he came of age, he living with one of them in London. But when he attained his majority, he soon showed himself to be tired of a London life; and he came down to take possession of Bulkeley Hall, and settle there. This was in the beginning of 1807; but for two or three months the Squire kept himself pretty quiet. All of a sudden, however, he became as gay as he was before tranquil and retired; and this change, we learnt, arose in consequence of his guardians leaving him, they having accompanied him to the Hall and remained there until all the papers and deeds connected with his accession to his property were signed. The moment they were gone, a number of fashionable gentlemen from London arrived as guests at the old mansion; and the long silent rooms echoed to the sounds of their late revellings. Then there were steeple-chases, and horse-racing, and cock-fighting, and badger-baiting, and all kinds of sports of that nature; and sometimes the young squire was more than half tipsy when he lounged into church in the middle of the Sunday evening service. His residence at the Hall did no good to the village trades-people, because he had every thing sent down from London;—and thus no one was rejoiced at his settling in that neighbourhood. My parents, particularly, had no good opinion of Squire Bulkeley; but, as the farm was their own, they had no positive fear of him, although our land joined his estates. This was not so, however, with the Daltons, who were only tenant-farmers, and rented their fifty or sixty acres of the Squire. The farm had been in old Dalton's family for many, many years, and was one of the best tilled and best stocked in the county; and as Mr. Dalton was always regular with his rent, it did not seem probable that the lease, which was shortly to expire, would be refused renewal.

"One morning,—it was in the month of June, I remember, Marion and myself happened to be alone together in the house, when the Squire, attended by his groom, rode up to the door. Marion sent me out to learn the cause of his visit. 'This is Farmer Splint's, my boy, I believe?' said the Squire, who, I should observe, was a handsome young man in spite of his dissipated appearance. I replied in the affirmative, adding, that my father was not at home. 'Who is at home, then?' asked the Squire; 'for I caught a glimpse of a face so pretty just now at the window, that I should not mind beholding it again.—'That was my sister, Marion, sir,' I answered, not seeing any thing insolent in his remark; but, perhaps, rather pleased by it, as it flattered a sister of whom I was very fond.—'Well, my boy,' said the Squire, leaping from his horse, 'here is a crown for you; and now be off and try and find your father, as I want to speak to him. In the mean time I will walk in and rest myself.' Catching the coin which he threw me, I hurried away, delighted with the handsome present, and naturally thinking that the visit of so liberal a gentleman must be with a motive beneficial to my father. But after hunting every where for him about the farm, I remembered that he and my mother had gone to the village to make some purchases. The village was a mile and a half distant from our house; and as I knew that they would be back to dinner at one, I returned

straight home, expecting to find them already arrived. The groom was walking the horses up and down at a little distance; and, therefore, I was convinced that the Squire was still waiting within. My hand was just upon the latch of the door, when a scream burst upon my ears; and immediately afterwards I heard Marion's voice reproaching the Squire bitterly for some insult which he had offered her. I hastened into the house, and my presence appeared to disconcert Mr. Bulkeley completely. He was standing in the middle of the room, as if uncertain what course to adopt in a case of embarrassment; and he turned as red as scarlet when he saw me. Marion was at the further end of the apartment, near a door opening into the kitchen; and she was arranging her hair, which had been disordered; while her cheeks were also crimsoned, but, as I thought, with the glow of indignation; whereas the face of the Squire was flushed with shame.

"I advanced towards Marion, asking, 'What is the matter? why did you scream out? and what has he been doing to you?'—'Nothing, Tim,' she replied, but with a profound sob. 'Have you met father?'—'No; I forgot that he'd gone to the village; but he will be home in a minute or two, as its close on one.'—'I shall call another day, then, Miss,' said the Squire; and he hurried abruptly away. For some minutes neither Marion or myself spoke a word. I suppose she was endeavouring to compose herself, and also deliberating what course she should pursue; while, on my side, I did not like to question her. At length she approached me, and said, 'Tim, you are a good boy, and always do what sister tells you. Now, mind and do n't mention a word about that gentleman having been rude to me. I have reasons of my own for it. And do n't say either, that you were so long away when he was here.' I promised to follow Marion's injunctions; for I was very fond of her, as I have before said. Accordingly, when my father and mother had come back, and we were all seated at dinner, Marion remarked in an indifferent manner that the Squire had called to see our father, and that he had given me a five-shilling piece. 'I wonder what he can want with me?' said my father: 'it was certainly very kind of him to make Tim such a handsome present; but after all I have heard of him, I would rather that he should honour us with his visits as rarely as possible. However, he can do us no harm—nor any good, that I know of; for he has no land to let at present, and I am not disposed to hire any even if he had.' There the subject was dismissed, at least so far as remarks thereon were concerned; but I saw that Marion was thoughtful and even melancholy during the remainder of the day.

"About a week had elapsed, and my father and I were one afternoon proceeding along the borders of our land, just where it was separated by a quickset hedge from the Squire's estate, when Mr. Bulkeley himself, alone and on foot, suddenly appeared at a stile. My father and I touched our hats with the usual respect shown by country people to great folks; and the Squire, who had for a moment shrunk back on seeing us, exclaimed, 'Farmer Splint, you are the very man I wanted to fall in with; and that very field in which you are standing is the object of my business with you.'—'How so, sir?' asked my father.—'Why,' returned the Squire, 'you see it cuts awkwardly into my estate, and breaks in on

the very best preserves I have in this quarter. — ‘Begging pardon, sir,’ said my father, ‘I could wish it broke a little more on your preserves; for your hares and pheasants do a world of harm to my fields when the corn is just springing up. I lost more than an acre by them last year, sir.’ — ‘So much the greater folly on your part, Farmer Splint,’ exclaimed the Squire, ‘to persist in remaining a landowner. You never can get a good living out of so small a farm as your’s.’ — ‘I get enough for all our wants sir, and am able to assist a friend now and then,’ said my father. — ‘Well, but if you sell your land and become a tenant-farmer, you will be much better off,’ observed the Squire. ‘Suppose, for instance, I bought the land? why, you would have received compensation for the injury done to your crop by the game in my preserves.’ — ‘But I should lose my independence, sir,’ said my father, in a firm though perfectly respectful manner. — ‘Your independence!’ ejaculated Mr. Bulkeley, with a sneer. ‘Then, I am to imagine that you consider yourself a regular landowner, one of the lords of the soil. May be you will dub yourself *Squire* next! Squire Splint, eh?’ — ‘I am plain Farmer Splint, sir, and so I hope to remain,’ was the answer. — ‘Then you will not sell me that field?’ — ‘I had rather not, sir.’ — ‘But you may have an equivalent portion of my seven-acre field over by the mill yonder; and your property will be much more compact.’ — ‘But the land is not equally serviceable, sir,’ answered my father, ‘and therefore I must decline the bargain. Besides, it may be fancy on my part; but it is true notwithstanding, that I am rather superstitious in making boundary changes in a farm that has been so long in my family; unless it was to extend it by a purchase of land, and *that* I can’t afford. So good day, sir;’ and my father, touching his hat, walked on. I saw the Squire’s lips quivering with rage as he stood looking after us; and, young as I was, yet I thought my father had made an enemy of him—for the conversation which I have just detailed, produced a deep impression upon me.

“Six or seven weeks had passed away since this little incident, when I one day met the Squire as I was going on an errand for my mother to the village. He was on horse-back, and his groom was in attendance. I was thinking whether I ought to touch my hat to him or not, after his insolence to my father, when he pulled up, exclaiming, ‘Holloa! youngster—your name is Splint, I believe?’ — ‘Yes, sir.’ — ‘Ah! I remember. You are a very good lad, and I should wish to become a friend to you. I think I gave you a crown once: well, here’s another. And now answer me a question or two. Did your sister ever say a word to her father or mother about that visit of mine some weeks past, you know?’ — ‘I was so bewildered by the apparent liberality of the Squire, and, boy-like, was so rejoiced at the possession of the coin which I was rolling over and over in my hand, that I suffered myself to be sifted by him at will; and I acquainted him with the injunctions that my sister Marion had given me on the occasion to which he had alluded. He seemed much pleased, but not particularly astonished. In fact, it is of course easy to understand what was passing in his mind, although I could not *then* fathom his thoughts. The respect which my father had shown him when they met in the fields, evidently induced him to believe that Marion had not acquainted her parents with his rudeness to her;

and now he was pleased to receive from my lips a confirmation of his conjecture on that point. It was also natural for him to imagine that Marion was not in reality so much offended with him as she had appeared to be; and it was doubtless with this impression upon his mind that he proceeded to address me in the following manner:—‘To tell you the truth, my boy, I behaved rather rudely to your charming sister; and I have repented of it ever since. I do not like to call and offer an apology, because your father or mother, or both, might be present. But if you will deliver a note to her privately, I will write one; for I shall not feel happy till I have convinced her that I am sorry for the past.’ — ‘I am sure, sir,’ I replied, ‘I shall be most happy to deliver such a letter to my sister, and she will be most pleased to receive it; because she has often told me that we always ought to forgive those who show repentance for their errors.’ — ‘An excellent maxim, my boy!’ cried the Squire. He then desired me to wait for him in a particular shop, which he named, in the village; and, turning back, he rode thitherward, followed by his groom. I walked on, thinking that the Squire was a much better man than he had at first seemed,—wondering too, how he could have been so harsh and unjust in his observations towards my father, and yet so ready to acknowledge the impropriety of his conduct towards my sister.

“Arrived in the village, I performed the commission entrusted to me by my mother, and then repaired to the shop of Mr. Snowdon, chemist and druggist, as directed by the young Squire. This gentleman was leaning on the counter, writing on the sheet of paper with which the obsequious Mr. Snowdon had provided him; and when it was terminated, the Squire folded it, sealed it, and addressed it to *Miss Marion Splint*. Mr. Snowdon caught a glimpse of the superscription, although he pretended to be looking quite another way. The letter was then handed to me by the Squire, accompanied by a whispered injunction to be sure and give it privately to Marion; while another crown-piece anointed my hand at the same time. I promised compliance with the instructions given, and hurried back home. George Dalton was there, and he stayed to dinner; but he departed soon afterwards, taking an affectionate leave of Marion as usual. My father also went out to his work; my mother repaired to the dairy; and I was now alone with my sister. ‘Marion, dear,’ said I, ‘I have got a surprise for you.’ — ‘A surprise for me, Tim!’ she exclaimed. — ‘Yes; a letter from Squire Bulkeley.’ — ‘Tim!’ she cried, ‘you surely—’ — ‘Pray read it, Marion dear,’ I interrupted her. ‘Its contents are a most respectful apology for his conduct some weeks ago. In fact, he spoke quite like a gentleman about it, and said how sorry he was.’ Marion no longer hesitated to open the letter; but I saw that her countenance suddenly became crimson, and she hastened up to her own chamber, without uttering another word.

“An hour passed away, and she came down again. Having assured herself that our mother was still occupied in the dairy, she said to me, ‘Tim dear, you must do me a kindness this very evening.’ — ‘That I will, Marion,’ I answered. ‘What is it?’ — ‘Here is a letter for Squire Bulkeley,’ she said, and it struck me that there was something singular and not altogether natural in her voice and man-

ner. 'If you meet father on the way, say that you are going to inquire after neighbour Jones's little daughter; and never tell any one, Tim, that you did this for me. You are not old enough yet to understand my motives; but when you are, you shall know them.'—I was never accustomed to question my sister, nor even to deliberate on any thing she did; and away I sped to Bulkeley Hall. The Squire was not at home; and so I left the letter. On my return to the farm-house, I told Marion what I had done: she said I was a good boy, and repeated her injunctions of the strictest secrecy.

"About a week after this incident, George Dalton took me out for a ramble with him. I never saw him so happy and in such excellent spirits. He spoke of the prospects of a good harvest; and observed that every thing seemed to hold out a promise of happiness for Marion and himself. Then he told me how glad he would always be to see me at his farm when my sister should have become his wife. In this way he was talking, and I was listening very attentively, when, as we were crossing a field on Squire Bulkeley's estate, that gentleman suddenly appeared on the other side of the hedge. 'Holloa! you fellows,' he cried; 'don't you know you're trespassing?'—'I was 'nt aware of it, Sir,' replied George, touching his hat: 'the field has always been used as a short cut by the people of the village; and there have been a foot-path and a stile at each end, ever since I can remember.'—'And if my guardians chose to permit the village people to use this short cut, it is no reason why I should,' exclaimed the Squire, purple with rage. 'And so I order you off at once, both of you.'—'Well, su,' said George, still respectfully but firmly, 'we shall never trespass again, now that we know it is trespassing.'—'Go back, then!' cried Mr. Bulkeley. 'As we are nearer the other end of the field, we may as well continue our walk in that direction, sir,' returned George. 'It can't possibly make any difference to you.'—'Yes, but it does though,' shouted the Squire. 'I order you off; and you shan't advance another step.' Thus speaking, he sprang through the hedge, and came towards us in a menacing manner. 'Look you, Squire Bulkeley,' said George Dalton, without retreating a single pace: 'you warn me off your grounds, and I am prepared to obey. But you shall not bully me, for all that.'—'Bully you!' cried the great man, now turning perfectly white: 'do you think a gentleman like me knows what it is to bully?'—'I think it seems very much as if you did, sir,' answered George coolly. 'Low-bred scoundrel, insolent clod-hopper!' exclaimed the Squire: 'you are not fit to stand in the presence of a gentleman. Go back to your Marion, and console yourself with my leavings in that quarter!'—'Villain! what do you mean?' cried George, rushing forward to grasp the Squire by the throat. 'Wait one moment!' exclaimed the latter raising his arm and stepping back a few paces. 'I tell you that Marion knows how to prefer a gentleman to a swineherd; and that boy there can prove it,' he added, pointing to me.

"George Dalton turned a hasty and angry glance upon me; and I saw him become deadly pale and tremble violently—I suppose because he saw that my manner was embarrassed and confused. 'Tim,' he said, in a hoarse and thick voice, 'do you know what this person means?' and he pointed disdainfully towards the Squire, who seemed to feel a

diabolical delight at the evident pain which he was inflicting upon my sister's lover.—'If that boy tells the truth,' said Mr. Bulkeley, 'he will admit—.'—'The children of Farmer Splint were never known to tell a falsehood,' interrupted George Dalton; 'and though you, sir, have made most cowardly and insulting allusions to Marion, you are well aware that there breathes not a purer being than she is, nor a greater scoundrel and liar than you are. And if I restrain my hands from touching you, it is only because you are too contemptible for serious notice. Come, Tim: let us move on.'—'One word, George Dalton!' cried the Squire, his lips quivering with rage. 'Ask that boy whether he knows of any thing that has ever taken place between me and Marion. Remember, I am your landlord; and your father's lease expires next Christmas.'—'We do n't care for the threats of a man like you, who endeavours to cause a breach between me and a young lass that never did you any harm.'—'Oh! not at all; but a great deal of good, on the contrary,' said the Squire, with a chuckle of triumph. 'Why, it is but a week ago since that boy was the bearer of the last notes which passed between us.'—'Liar!' thundered George Dalton; and he was again on the point of rushing on the Squire, when he checked himself, and turning to me said, 'Now, Tim, you are no story-teller; and, indeed, I ought scarcely to insult Marion so far as to ask such a question. But can you not tell this man to his face that he is what I just now called him; namely, a liar?'—'Not if he tells the truth,' observed Mr. Bulkeley coolly.—'I hung down my head, and wished at the moment that the earth would open and swallow me up.'—'Tim,' said George Dalton, again speaking in a hoarse tone, as dark suspicions were revived in his mind, 'does this person who calls himself a gentleman utter facts? did you ever convey letters between him and your sister? Come, answer me, my boy: I cannot be angry with you.'—'I faltered out a faint 'Yes.'—'Then God have mercy upon me!' exclaimed George Dalton, in a voice of piercing anguish, as he clasped his hands convulsively together.

"The Squire stood gazing upon him with fiend-like malignity. I cannot describe the dreadful picture of despair which George at that moment seemed to be. At length he turned again towards me, and, grasping my shoulder so tight that I nearly screamed out with pain, he said, 'Tim, tell me all, or I shall do you a mischief. Does Marion receive letters from Mr. Bulkeley?—'She did one,' I stammered in reply, 'because I took it to her. The Squire wrote it at Mr. Snowdon's.'—'And did Marion answer it?' he demanded.—'She did,' I answered: 'but—.'—'Have you ever seen the Squire and Marion together?' he asked in a hurried and now dreadfully excited tone.—'Yes, once,' I said: 'but—.'—'And again I was about to give certain explanations relative to what the Squire himself had represented to me to be the nature and object of his letter to my sister—namely, to apologise to her for some insult which he had offered her: but George Dalton had not patience to hear me. Rushing upon the Squire, he struck him to the ground, exclaiming, 'Vile seducer! you glory in the ruin you have accomplished!' and then he darted away, clearing the hedge with a bound, and was almost immediately out of sight.

"The Squire rose slowly and with pain from the ground, muttering the most dreadful threats of ven-

geance; and I, afraid that he might do me a mischief, hurried off as quick as possible. I was old enough to comprehend that George Dalton believed my sister to have been faithless to him; and the same impression rapidly forced itself on my own mind. Still I was sorry that George had not waited to hear all the additional circumstances which I was about to relate; and it somehow or another struck me that he would call on Mr. Snowdon, the chemist. I cannot now account for this idea which I entertained; but I suppose it must have been because that person's name was mentioned in the conversation, and because I must have thought it probable that George would seek the fullest confirmation of his cause of unhappiness. It is, however, very certain that I hastened off to the village as quick as my legs would carry me. But just as I entered Mr. Snowdon's shop, I caught sight of George Dalton, standing at the counter talking to that individual. He had his back towards me; and the chemist was so occupied with the subject of conversation, that he also did not notice my entrance. I knew not whether to advance or retreat; and while I stood hesitating, I overheard Dalton say, 'And you are sure that the letter was addressed to Marion?'—'I happened to catch a glimpse of the direction,' answered the chemist, 'and I saw the Squire give the lad Timothy some money.'—'Then am I indeed a wretched, miserable being!' exclaimed George Dalton; and he rushed wildly from the shop, not noticing me as he hurried by. I was so alarmed by his haggard looks and excited manner, that I was nailed as it were to the spot; and it was not until Mr. Snowdon had asked me two or three times what I wanted, that I recollected where I was. Then, without giving any reply, I quitted the shop, and repaired homewards.

"I was afraid to enter the house; for I felt convinced that poor Marion's happiness was menaced, and that even if she was not already aware of the presence of the storm, not many hours would elapse ere it would burst upon her head. And when I did reach the farm, my worst fears were confirmed. The place was in confusion; Marion was in a state bordering on distraction; and my father and mother were vainly endeavouring to comfort her. An open letter lay upon the table:—without reading its contents I could too well divine their nature and whence the missive came. For some minutes my entrance was unperceived; but when at last the intensity of Marion's grief was somewhat subdued, and her eyes fell on me, she exclaimed, 'Oh! Tim, what have you done? what have you been telling George, that he has written to say he will abandon me for ever, and that you can explain the cause?'—'Reveal the whole truth, boy,' said my father sternly, 'as some atonement for the misery which you have been instrumental in producing.'—I then related all that had occurred with the Squire and at the apothecary's shop.—My father and mother showed, by their lowering countenances and searching glances towards my sister, that they were a prey to harrowing suspicions; but they did not interrupt the current of my story. Then, when I had concluded, Marion, without waiting to be asked for an explanation, gave it in the following manner:—

"You cannot, my dear parents, think for a moment that I have acted unworthily. Imprudent I

may have been—but guilty, Oh! no—no! One day the Squire called here, as you are well aware—and he sent Tim to search after you, father. This was most probably a mere vile subterfuge on his part; for when Tim had departed, the bad man began to speak to me in a disparaging way of George; and when I begged him to desist, as he was wronging an excellent being, his language took a bolder turn. He paid me some compliments, which I affected not to hear; and at last his language grew so insulting, that I was about to quit the room, when he caught me round the waist. Oh! how can I tell you his insulting language?—but he proposed to me—to me, your daughter, and beloved by George Dalton as I then was,—the detestable man implored me to fly with him to his mansion—to become his mistress!—Here my father and mother made a movement indicative of deep indignation; and Marion then continued thus:—'I started away from him—I was rushing towards that inner room, when Tim returned. I was now no longer alarmed, though still boiling with anger: nevertheless I had presence of mind sufficient to command my emotion so far as not to utter a word of reproach or complaint in the presence of my brother. For, in a moment, did I perceive how necessary it was to retain in my own breast the secret of the gross insult which I had received. I reasoned to myself that the Squire was the landlord of the Daltons—that their lease would expire at the end of the year—that it would break the old man's heart to be compelled to quit a farm which had been in his family for so many years—and that George possessed a fiery spirit, which would render him blind to the consequences of avenging on the Squire the insults offered to me. Of all this I thought: those ideas flashed rapidly through my brain;—and I therefore not only resolved to remain silent in respect to the insolence of Mr. Bulkeley, but also tutored Tim to be so reserved, that you, my dear father and mother, should not notice any thing unusual having occurred. When Tim brought me the Squire's note, a week ago, I scarcely hesitated to read it, thinking that it might indeed contain an apology. But, oh! you may conceive my feelings, when I discovered that it repeated the insulting proposals made to me on the first occasion. I knew not how to act; and prudence struggled with wounded pride. But I reflected that Mr. Bulkeley was wealthy and powerful enough to crush us all—for we have seen instances, my dear parents, of the rich landowners ruining the small farmers, who to all appearance were independent of them: and again I resolved to adopt a cautious line of conduct. I accordingly answered the Squire's note. I implored him, as he was a gentleman and a Christian, not to molest me more with importunities from which my very heart revolted: I besought him not to ruin for ever the happy prospects of two families by any means of vengeance with which circumstances or accident might supply him; and I conjured him to believe that, in keeping secret all that had hitherto passed between us, I was actuated only by the best of motives. That letter was the one which Tim conveyed to the Squire; and now, my dear parents, you know all.'

"I remember perfectly well that my father and mother were greatly affected by the narrative which my pure-minded sister thus related to them, and which was frequently interrupted by burst of bitter anguish on her part. She moreover added that she

possessed the Squire's letter to her and a copy of the one which she had written to him.—'Give me those papers, my dear child,' said my father: 'and I will at once proceed to neighbour Dalton's house. If I find George at home, I will undertake to bring him back with me to pass the remainder of the day, and to implore your forgiveness for his unjust suspicions; and if he is not there, I am sure to see my old friend, to whom I will give all the necessary explanations.'—Marion was somewhat soothed by the hopes thus held out; and our father departed to the Daltons' farm, which was about a mile off. Two hours elapsed before he came back; and when at last we perceived him returning through the fields, he was alone. Marion burst into tears: a presentiment of evil struck a chill to her heart; and as our father approached, the serious expression of his countenance filled us all with alarm. He entered and seated himself without uttering a word. Marion threw herself into his arms, saying in a broken voice, 'Father, tell me the worst: I can bear every thing save suspense.'—'My dearest child,' answered the old man, tears trickling down his cheeks, 'it has pleased heaven to afflict thee, and all of us likewise through thee. George has quitted his home, and—'—'And what?' demanded Marion hastily.—'And his father knows not whither he has gone,' continued he: 'but when the first fever of excitement is over, there can be no doubt that he will return. Old Mr. Dalton is perfectly satisfied.—'

"But Marion heard not the words last addressed to her: she had fainted in her father's arms;—and, when she was restored to consciousness, she was so unwell that she was immediately removed to her own chamber. For three weeks her life was despaired of; and she was constantly raving of George Dalton. But at last, youth, a good constitution, and the care taken of her, triumphed over the rage of fever; and she was pronounced out of danger. Alas! what replies could be given to her anxious, earnest questions concerning George? Old Dalton had not heard of him since the fatal day when he disappeared. Was he no more? had he in a moment of frenzy laid violent hands upon himself? There was too much reason to suppose that such was the case: otherwise, would he not have written, or returned? As gently as possible was the fatal truth, that no tidings had been received of him, broken to Marion; and a partial relapse was the consequence. But in another week she rallied again; and then the first time she spoke of him, she said in an excited tone as her feebleness would allow, 'Had he ceased to love me—had he loved another, I could have borne it! But that he should think me lost—faithless—degraded,—oh! that is worse than even the bitterness of death!'

"Slowly—slowly did Marion recover sufficiently to rise from her bed: but how altered was she! The gay, cheerful, ruddy girl, blooming with health and rustic beauty, was changed into a pale, moping, mournful creature, whose very presence seemed to render joy a crime and smiles a sacrilege. The autumn came—the corn was cut—the harvest, as plentiful as had been expected, was gathered in. Had George been there then, that was the period settled for the wedding. And, strange as it may seem, it was precisely on the day originally resolved upon as the one to render the young couple happy,—that old Dalton *did* receive tidings of his son. George was alive, and had enlisted in a regiment then sta-

tioned at Chatham, but shortly to embark for India. The young man wrote a letter communicating these facts, and referring to a former letter which he had written to his father a few days after he had quitted home, but the miscarriage of which had produced so much uncertainty and painful suspense. The colour came back to Marion's cheeks when she heard that her lover was alive; and she said, 'Even though I may never see him more, I can yet be happy; for he will now learn that I am still as I have ever been, his faithful and devoted Marion!' Meantime, old Dalton and my father were deliberating together what course to pursue; and it was determined that the discharge of George should be immediately purchased. The proper steps were taken, under the advice of an attorney in the nearest market-town; and in the mean time his father wrote to him a full account of the Squire's treachery and Marion's complete innocence. The return of post brought the tenderest and most pathetic letter to Marion, imploring her forgiveness, and assuring her that his extreme love had driven him to such a state of desperation as to render his native district hateful to him, and had induced him to enlist. I need scarcely say, that Marion now enjoyed hopes of happiness again: her cheeks recovered their lost bloom—her step grew light as formerly, and her musical voice once more awoke the echoes of the homestead. In six weeks time we heard that George was free, and on his way home. He came:—it is impossible to describe the unbounded joy of the meeting!

"And now there was no longer any obstacle to the union of the lovers, nor any wish in any quarter to delay it. The marriage was accordingly celebrated; and a happier pair never issued from the village-church; nor did ever the bells appear to ring so merrily before. There were grand doings at our farm-house, for my mother was determined to give a treat to all her neighbours;—and the feast was such a one as I never can forget. Long after George had borne away his bride to his father's house, which, as already long before arranged, was to be the young couple's home, the dancing was kept up on the green in front of our dwelling, though the cold weather had already begun to show itself. But all hearts were gay and happy, and warm with good feelings; and the old ale and the punch flowed bountifully; for it was one of those days in people's lives which are a reward for whole ages of care. Ah! when I look back at those times, and think of what I was—and now reflect for a moment on what I am—But, no; I must not reflect at all. Let me continue this history without pausing for meditation!

"The happiness of both families was now complete; for even old Dalton declared that he had so much reason for joy in the turn which circumstances had lately taken, that he could even make up his mind to receive a refusal when he should apply for the renewal of his lease. But just at this time fortune seemed determined to be propitious; for Squire Bulkeley, who was in London when the return of George and the marriage took place, sent down a legal gentleman to make arrangements with his steward for the sale of a part of his estate in Hampshire, as he wanted to make up the money to purchase a small property in Kent. He was a wild and reckless fellow, and full of whims and fancies; and he cared not which portion of his land was sold

so long as his preserves and park were left. Well, it happened that old Dalton, hearing of this, went straight to the lawyer, and proposed to purchase the farm which had been rented by his family for so many years. The offer was accepted: by the aid of my father the money was made up and paid. Dalton was now a landowner; but he did not remain so long—for he made over all his newly acquired property to his son George, who laboured hard to improve it.

"Shortly after this transaction, it was rumoured in the neighbourhood that the Squire had flown into a tremendous passion when he received the news that the Daltons had purchased the farm. He had no doubt intended to turn them out at Christmas; but he had omitted to except their farm from the part of the estate to be sold. The Daltons cared nothing for his anger; and George even said that he now considered himself sufficiently avenged upon the perfidious gentleman. Shortly after Christmas the Squire came down to Bulkeley Hall with a party of friends; and the mansion once again rang with the din of revellers. And now I come to a very important incident in my narrative.

"One day George Dalton had occasion to visit the neighbouring market-town to buy a horse; and he stayed to dine in company with the other farmers at the principal inn. The landlord of the inn dined at the same table with his guests; and, during the meal, he informed the company that a poor discharged gamekeeper had died at the house on the preceding evening, leaving behind him his only possession—the only thing that he had been able to retain from the wreck of his former prosperity, namely, a beautiful greyhound. The farmers were interested in the tale, and instantly made a subscription to defray the expenses of the poor man's funeral, and remunerate the good landlord for the care and attention which he had bestowed on the deceased during his last illness. The hound was brought in, and every one admired it greatly. The landlord observed that his wife had such an aversion to dogs, he did not dare keep it on the premises; and he proposed that the farmers should raffle amongst them to decide to whom the hound should belong. This was assented to; and the lot fell on George Dalton. He accordingly took the dog home with him, and related all that had occurred to his father and his wife, both of whom were much pleased by the acquisition of such a fine animal, and under such interesting circumstances. The poor gamekeeper's dog accordingly became an immediate favourite.

"About a week or ten days afterwards, and in the month of February, George went out early, accompanied by the hound. The morning was fine and frosty, but excessively cold; and George whistled cheerily as he went along, Ponto trotting close at his heels. Suddenly a hare started from her form; and away dashed the greyhound after her. George knew that he had no right to pursue game even on his own land; and he ran after the dog as hard as he could, calling him back. But he might as well have whistled against the thunder: Ponto was too eager in the chase to mind the invocations of his master. Well, after a short but exciting run, the hound caught and killed the hare in the very last field belonging to George's farm, the adjoining land being the Squire's. And, sure enough, at that very instant Mr. Bulkeley

appeared, accompanied by two gamekeepers, on the other side of the boundary palings. 'George Dalton, by God!' cried the Squire, with a malignant sneer on his countenance.—But George took no notice of his enemy; for he had promised Marion in the most solemn manner to avoid all possibility of quarrelling with so dangerous an individual.—'I did not know that you took out a certificate, Mr. Dalton,' observed the Squire, after a pause.—'Neither do I, sir,' replied George in a cold but respectful manner; 'and I have done nothing that I am ashamed of; for, if you have been here many minutes, you must have heard me trying to call the dog off.'—'We know what we heard, Mr. Dalton,' said the Squire, with a significant grin at his gamekeepers;—and away the gentleman and keepers went, chuckling audibly. The very next day an information was laid by the Squire against George Dalton, who accordingly attended before the magistrates. Squire Bulkeley was himself a justice of the peace; and he sat on the bench along with his brother magistrates, acting as both judge and prosecutor. The two gamekeepers swore that they saw George encourage the dog to pursue the hare; and it was in vain that the defendant represented the whole circumstances of the case. He was condemned in the full penalty and costs, and abused shamefully into the bargain. Smarting under the iron scourge of oppression, and acting by the advice of an attorney whom he had employed in the case, George Dalton gave notice of appeal to the Quarter Sessions. His wife, my father, and old Mr. Dalton implored him to settle the matter at once and have done with it: but he declared that he should be unworthy of the name of an Englishman if he suffered himself to be thus trampled under the feet of the despotic magistracy. The attorney, who was hungry after a job, nagged him on, too; and thus every preparation was made to carry the affair before the Sessions.

"The event made a great stir in that part of the country, and the liberal papers took George's part. They said how utterly worthless, as an engine of justice, was the entire system of the unpaid magistracy; and they denounced that system as a monstrous oppression, instituted against the people.*

* Taken as a body, there is not a more infamous and tyrannical set of authorities on the face of the earth than the unpaid magistracy of England. How the high spirited people of this country can endure such an atrocious system, is to us surprising. Almost entirely irresponsible—chosen on account of their wealth and influence in their respective counties, but without the least reference to their abilities—and, by the very circumstances of their position, opposed to the interests of the masses, the justices of the peace are so many diabolical tyrants vested with a power which completely coerces the industrious and labouring classes. If it be necessary to have paid barristers as magistrates in the cities and great towns, why should not the same rule apply to smaller towns and to rural districts? To invest an irresponsible, narrow-minded, and prejudiced body of men with such immense powers as those wielded by magistrates, is a foul blot upon our civilisation. Prison-chains, fines, and treadmills are at the disposal of these justices; and the use they make of their power proves that the entire system on which their attributes and jurisdiction are based, deserve universal execration. Thousands and thousands of honest, well-meaning, hard-working families have been ruined by this hierarchy of terrestrial fiends. Talk of the freedom of the British subject, and boast of the trial by jury. Why, any magistrate, by his own single decision, can award heavy fines or months of imprisonment! The *etc.*



Well, the case came on before the assembled magistrates; but on the bench sate not only the justice who had condemned George Dalton, but likewise Squire Bulkeley, the prosecutor himself. Judgment was given against my brother-in-law; and he suddenly found himself called upon to pay about sixty pounds—the amount of all the aggregate expenses which the original case and the appeal occasioned. The money was made up with great difficulty, and not without my father's aid; and though George Dalton was thus relieved from any fears of the consequences, yet he became an altered man. He went to work with a heavy heart, because he could not prevent himself from brooding over his wrongs. He also found frequent excuses for visiting the

paid magistracy exists as a protection and also as an agency for the infernal Game Laws. Their local powers and influence give them immense weight in general elections, for poor people are afraid to offend them. But the worst kind of unpaid magistrates are the clergymen who are in the commission of the peace. These men unusually act more like off-shoots of the Czar of Russia than as magistrates in a civilized country and as ministers of the charitable and generous doctrines of the Christian faith.

village; and on those occasions he never failed to step into the ale-house for a few minutes. There he found sympathizers; and his generous nature prompted him to treat those who took his part. One pot led to another; and every time he entered the ale-house, his stay was prolonged. Care now entered both the farm-houses. In one, old Dalton and Marion deplored the change which had taken place in George; and in the other, my parents could not close their ears to the rumours which reached them, nor shut their eyes against the altered manner of their son-in-law. The great proof of dogged obstinacy which George gave, was in his conduct respecting the hound. Those who wished him well, implored him to dispose of it; but he declared that he considered himself bound, by reason of the manner in which he had acquired the dog, to maintain and treat the animal kindly. He, however, kept Ponto chained up in the farm-yard.

"Time wore on: the summer arrived and passed, and the autumn yielded so good a harvest that the produce was a complete set off against the heavy expenses entailed on the two families by the unlucky appeal. This circumstance somewhat cheered

George's spirits; and the birth of a fine boy restored him almost completely to his former gaiety. In the evening, instead of finding some pretence to repair to the village, he sat with his beloved Marion; and happiness once more entered the homestead. But misfortune was again impending over the head of George Dalton. It was one morning in the month of November, that he was repairing to his work, with a spade and a hoe over his shoulder, whistling as he was wont to do ere oppression had wronged him; and wondering, also, how he could ever have been so foolish as to pay such frequent visits to the public-house in the village. His mind was occupied, too, with the image of his Marion, whom he had left nourishing her babe; and perhaps his heart was never lighter than at that moment. But suddenly, he heard a slight noise behind him; and, turning round, he beheld Ponto, who, having succeeded in slipping his collar, had scampered after his master. George's first impulse was to secure the dog; but, as the devil would have it, at that very instant a hare jumped from her form close by. Ponto escaped from George's grasp, and the chase ensued. My brother-in-law was bewildered—he knew not how to act; but at last he pursued the hound, taking care, however, not to call him. Away went Ponto—the hare doubled and turned—George managing to keep them in sight. At length, to his horror, the hare swept towards a hedge, which in that point separated the Daltons' property from the Squire's preserves:—the hedge was passed by the pursued and the pursuing animals, and the chase was now maintained on Mr. Bulkeley's estate. But the run soon terminated by the death of the hare; and George, after casting a rapid glance around to assure himself that the coast was clear, sprang through the hedge to secure Ponto. He was, however, doomed to misfortune on this, as on the former occasion. The gamekeepers were up before he could retrace his steps into his own property; and he was immediately seized as a poacher and a trespasser. In dogged silence he accompanied the keepers to the house of the same magistrate who had before convicted him; but that 'worthy gentleman' was absent in London, and the prisoner was accordingly taken before the rector of the parish, who was also in the commission of the peace. The Squire was sent for, and the case was entered into under all the unfavourable circumstances of a previous conviction—a fruitless appeal—the exaggerated or positively false representations of the game-keepers—the malignity of the Squire, and the readiness of his Reverence to believe every thing that was set forth to the prejudice of the prisoner. The parson-justice determined to send the case to the Sessions; and George was ordered to find bail. This was easily done, and he was accordingly liberated.

"This second misfortune, of the same kind, plunged the two families into the deepest affliction, and made Marion very ill. George said but little on the subject: he refused this time to employ any legal advice in getting up his defence, both on account of the expense, and because it was notorious that the unpaid magistrates always dealt more harshly with those persons who *dared* to show fight with the weapons of the law. Again there was a great sensation in the neighbourhood; and every one waited anxiously for the day of trial. That day came; and George left his Marion on a bed of sickness, to re-

pair to the market-town. The Squire, the parson justice, and the magistrate who had convicted the defendant on the previous occasion, and who had by this time returned from London, were all on the bench. The two gamekeepers swore that George Dalton had coursed with the same hound which had led him into trouble before—that he had persisted in keeping the dog in spite of the remonstrances of his friends—that in the case then under the cognizance of the court, he had encouraged the dog to chase the hare—that he had followed into the Squire's land—and that he was in the act of concealing the hare about his person when he was stopped by the keepers. George told the entire truth in defence, and implored the magistrates not to allow him to be crushed and ruined by the malignity of Squire Bulkeley. He was then about to enter into explanations to show wherefore the Squire persecuted him; but the chairman stopped him abruptly, saying, that he had no right to impute improper motives to any member of the court. The Squire, moreover, indignantly—or, at least, with seeming indignation—denied any such selfish purposes as those sought to be imputed to him; and it was very evident, that even if the magistrates were not already prejudiced against Dalton, this attempt at explanation on his part fully succeeded in rendering them so. George was sentenced to three months' imprisonment in the County House of Correction; and he was forthwith removed thither without being allowed to go home first and embrace his sick wife.

"You may suppose that Marion was distracted when she received this intelligence, although my mother went and broke it to her as gently as possible. Old Dalton was so overwhelmed with grief that he became dreadfully ill, took to his bed, and died three weeks after his beloved son's condemnation. My mother went to stay altogether with Marion until George's return, which took place at the expiration of his sentence. But how he was altered!—altered in mind as well as in personal appearance. He was gaol-tainted: his honourable feelings were impaired—his generous sympathies were ruined. He was still kind and tender to Marion and his child; but his visits to the ale-house soon re-commenced, and he neglected his work more and more. One night, about six weeks after his release from prison, a tremendous conflagration was seen in the immediate neighbourhood of the Squire's mansion: all the out-houses and farms were on fire; and, despite of the assistance rendered by Mr. Bulkeley's people, those premises were reduced to ashes. That it was the work of an incendiary was clearly ascertained; and suspicion instantly pointed to George Dalton. He was taken before a magistrate and examined; but nothing could be proved against him. The magistrate, however, observed, that he felt convinced of George's guilt, and deeply regretted the necessity there was to discharge him. I well remember that my father and mother evinced by their manner their fears that George was indeed the incendiary.

"From that moment a dreadful change came over my sister Marion. She grew profoundly melancholy; but not a murmur nor a complaint escaped her lips. There can be no doubt that *she* was aware who the incendiary was; and that knowledge was the death-blow to her happiness. The child, deprived of its proper nutriment—for Marion wasted to a mere shadow—drooped and died; and the poor

mother declared hysterically that it's loss was the greatest blessing which could have happened to her. This was the only allusion she was ever heard to make, direct or indirect, to the unhappystate of her mind and of her home. George continued kind to her; but kind rather in the shape of forbearance than in tokens of affection: that is to say, he never said a harsh word to her—nor beat her—nor slighted her; but he gave her little of his society, and was usually silent and thoughtful when in her presence.

"One day the parson-justice, whom I have before mentioned, called on the Daltons, and remonstrated with George on his conduct in absenting himself from church.—'I shall never go again, sir,' was the dogged answer.—'And why not?' demanded the clergyman.—'Because I got no good by it,' replied Dalton. 'The more I strove to be respectable, the more I was persecuted. The hound I liked, almost as if it was a human being, and which got me into two dreadful scrapes, was obliged to be given away; my father was killed by grief for my wrongs; and my wife's sorrow has led to the death of my child. My character is gone; and I know that sooner or later, I must be ruined, as I have no heart for work. Every thing that one prays for, and that I have so often prayed for, has been swept away: I mean an honest reputation; the bread of industry; a cheerful disposition, and the health and long life of those who are near and dear to us.'—'Then you refuse to go to church any more?' said the parson-justice.—

'I do,' was the answer; 'and the law can't compel me.'—'We shall see,' observed the Rector; and away he went. A few days afterwards the Squire issued a summons for George Dalton to attend before him. George went, and found that the Rector had laid an information against him, under an obsolete Act of Parliament,* for having absented himself from divine service during a period of six months. George was astounded at the charge, but could not deny its truth. The Squire accordingly sentenced him to a month's imprisonment in the House of Correction; and George was taken back to his old quarters—to the farther contamination of a gaol!

"This was another dreadful blow for Marion; and it produced such an effect upon our father, that, like old Dalton, he fell ill, and soon died. When George was liberated once more, he was compelled to part with his farm at a great loss; for his misfortunes and his absence on two occasions had left it but indifferently cultivated; and, moreover, as my father was now gone, it was thought better that we should all live together. Dalton's farm was accordingly put up for sale; and the Squire became the possessor of the land once more. George was now almost constantly at the ale-house. Instead of expending the money realised by the sale of the farm, after paying the debts due, in increasing the stock and improving the tillage of our land, he squandered it away on worthless companions. His wife never remonstrated when he came home late; but would sit up for him patiently and resignedly: and if ever my mother said any thing, she would observe, 'Poor George feels his wrongs too acutely to be able to bear up against them: there are great allowances to be made for him.' Thus did about two years pass away; and, though I and the two

labourers whom we kept worked hard on the farm, yet it wanted the master-hand to superintend; and we found that its produce now scarcely yielded a bare maintenance when every thing was paid. Marion gradually got worse; but her endurance was inexhaustible. It often gave me pain to look at that poor, pale, wasted young woman, and think of her blooming charms when she first loved George Dalton. Her heart was breaking slowly—slowly—slowly! Had she been passionate, or liable to the influence of strong emotions, she would have gone rapidly down to the tomb; but she was so meek—so amiable—so resigned—so patient—so enduring, that her very weakness was her strength.

"Upwards of two years had passed since George's second liberation from confinement, when it was found necessary to raise money to increase the stock of the farm, and buy seed for sowing. George applied to the same attorney who had got up his defence on the occasion of his appeal; and this man offered to induce one of his clients to lend a certain sum on George's and my mother's joint bill of exchange, which he said would save all the expense of a mortgage. My mother objected strongly; but George promised so faithfully to amend his conduct if she would consent, that she did agree. The money was raised; but a considerable portion found its way to the public-house before any purchases were made. Even then, George forgot his pledges, and became, if possible, more idle and dissipated than before. The bill became due, and there were no assets to meet it. The lawyer, however, undertook to manage the affair; and he induced George and my mother to sign some parchment deed, which he previously read over in a hasty mumbling way, and in which blanks were left for the names of another person who appeared to be interested in it; and also blanks for certain dates, fixing the particular conditions as to time. My mother inquired why the name of the other party was not filled in; and the lawyer replied, with a chuckle, 'Oh! that is for the name of my client; and as he has only lent the money to serve you, and not as a mere lender, motives of delicacy induce this suppression for the time being.'—My mother did not like it; but George urged her to sign, and she did so.

"Three months after that an execution was levied upon the farm, at the suite of Squire Bulkeley, the lawyer's accommodating client, who had hitherto kept his name secret! George Dalton was at first a prey to the most terrific rage; but he mastered his feelings at the intercession of Marion and our mother. We were compelled to quit the farm, which now became the property of the Squire, by virtue of the roguish deed which had been drawn up by the unprincipled attorney; and we retired to a humble lodging in the village. Need I say how we all felt this sad reverse—this dreadful degradation? My mother and Marion strove hard to subdue their anguish, in order not to irritate the already much excited George; but there were moments when his outbursts of rage were furious in the extreme. He invoked curses upon the head of the Squire, whom he denounced as the murderer of his father and of mine, and also of his child; and he vowed to wreak a deadly vengeance upon him. At the ale-house, it seems, these threats were repeated, accompanied with the bitterest imprecations. On the following day George was arrested, and conveyed before the parson-justice, on a charge of

* This Act is not only still unrepealed, but was put in force about eighteen months or two years ago, by certain county magistrates against two or three poor labourers.

threatening the life of Squire Bulkeley. He was ordered to find good bail for keeping the peace; but security was impossible in respect to one so fallen, lost, and characterless as he. To prison, then, again he was sent; and for three months he languished there, doubtless brooding over the awful wrongs which the Squire had heaped upon him. And all this time the Squire held up his head high; and no one in his own sphere of life seemed to think that he had acted at all unjustly or tyrannically. On the contrary, the gentry and the influential farmers in the neighbourhood, looked on George Dalton as an irreclaimable scamp, who had only got what he well deserved. Even those persons of the poorer class, who were formerly our friends, looked coldly on us, and shook their heads when the name of George Dalton was mentioned. So sure is it that if you give a dog a bad name, you may hang him.

"We lived as sparingly as possible on the wreck of our little property, during the three months that George's third imprisonment lasted, but I found it very difficult to get work, as the farmers said '*that I was as bad as my brother-in-law*.' And yet there was not a steadier lad in the whole county than myself; and, though invited, I never set foot in the ale-house. I was moreover regular in attendance at church, along with my mother and sister. But I got a bad name without deserving it; and even when I could procure a little employment, I was subjected to a thousand annoyances. Unpleasant hints would be dropped about the burning down of the Squire's out-houses, and the name of George Dalton was darkly alluded to in connexion with that business; or, if I refused, on a Saturday night, to accompany my fellow-labourers to the ale-house, I was taunted with knowing something that I was afraid of confessing to my cups. At that time I often thought of running away, and seeking my fortune elsewhere; but when I looked at my poor mother, now deprived of almost necessities, and my sister pining away, I had not the heart to do it. Besides, I was greatly attached to George Dalton, and was anxious to see in what state of mind he would come out of prison. Three times during his incarceration was Marion allowed to visit him; and on each occasion she returned home to our humble lodging weeping bitterly. Neither my mother nor myself ever questioned her much; for we knew her extreme devotion to George, and that she would not only always endeavour to conceal his failings as much as possible, but that she likewise strove to hold out hopes of his complete reformation. But when he was emancipated once more, he had become sullen, dogged, and morose—*forbearing* only in respect to Marion, to whom he could no longer be said to be positively kind. He did not mention the name of the Squire, nor in any way allude to him; neither did he visit the ale-house—and thus my mother and I began to hope that Marion's fond hopes were likely to be fulfilled.

"Having recruited his strength by a few days' rest, after his half-famished sojourn in the gaol, George one morning said to me, 'Now, Tim, you and me will go out and look for work.' We accordingly set off, but applied fruitlessly at all the farm-houses in the neighbourhood. Some did not want hands; others positively refused to have any thing to do with George Dalton or any one connected with him. We were returning homeward, mournful enough,

when we passed a large lime-kiln, the owner of which had been very intimate with George's father and mine. He happened to be coming up from the pit at the moment when we were passing; and stopping us, he entered into conversation. Finding that we were in search of work, he offered to employ us in the chalk-pit; and we readily accepted the proposal. Next day we went to work; and when the Saturday night came round, we were paid liberally. Thus several weeks elapsed; and we earned enough to keep the home comfortably. Our master was good and kind to us; and the spirits of my brother-in-law appeared to revive. But he never mentioned the Squire, nor alluded to the past oftener than he could help.

"We had been employed in this manner for about three months, when one evening George and I stayed later than the other labourers in the chalk-pit, to finish a job which we knew the owner wanted to be completed as soon as possible. It was ten o'clock before we made an end of our toil; and we were just on the point of retiring, when we saw two persons walking slowly along the brink of the chalk-pit. The moon was bright—the night was beautifully clear; and we obtained a full view of the two figures: but as we were at the bottom of the precipice, they could not have seen us, even if they had looked attentively downward. 'Tim,' said George, in a low, hoarse whisper, 'one of those men is the Squire. I recognised his infernal countenance just now when the moon-light fell full upon it.'—We remained perfectly quiet at the foot of the chalky side of the pit; although I do not believe that George had any bad intention in view, and I only stayed because he did.

"The Squire and his companion began to talk together; and by the name in which Mr. Bulkeley addressed the other, George and I immediately knew that he was one of the very gamekeepers who had twice perjured themselves in mis-stating the circumstances connected with the exploits of Ponto.—'And so you say that the scoundrel Dalton works in this pit now, eh?' observed the Squire.—'Yes, sir,' replied the other: 'he's come down to that at last.'—'By God! I never shall be contented till I send him to Botany Bay, or to the scaffold!' exclaimed the Squire. 'But sooner or later, you see, I obtain vengeance on those who offend me: Old Splint refused to sell me his field, and spoke insolently to me: he died of grief through all that has happened, and the entire farm is now mine. Old Dalton contrived to buy his land, through my cursed neglect in forgetting to tell my agent to except his property from any part that might be sold; but he also died of grief, and the land has come back to me. Ah! ah! I bought that in again too, no doubt to the vexation of young Dalton. Then, next we have the insolent jade Marion: she refused my overtures, and persisted in marrying Dalton; and what has she gained? Nothing but misery. As for George Dalton himself, he insulted and struck me, besides carrying off Marion as it were before my very eyes and making her his wife, when she was much more fitted to become my mistress;—and what has he got for his pains? I have crushed and ruined him, and I will never stop till I have shown him what it is to dare to offend an English landowner. But you say that this is the pit where he works?'—'Yes, sir,' answered the gamekeeper.—'Well, I shall see his master to-morrow,' continued the Squire; 'and I'll

be bound to say George Dalton will not do another week's work in this place. You may now go and join your men in the preserves; and I shall return to the Hall, by the short cut through the fields. The night is uncommonly fine, however, and is really tempting enough to make one stay out an hour or two.—'It is very fine, sir,' answered the gamekeeper. 'Good night, sir;—and the man walked rapidly away, the Squire remaining on the edge of the pit, about thirty feet above the spot where George and I were crouched up.

"Tim," said George at last,—and his voice was deep and hollow, although he spoke in a low whisper,—"do you remain here quite quiet: I must have a word or two with that man."—"For God's sake, George," I said, "do not seek a quarrel."—"No, I won't seek a quarrel exactly," returned my brother-in-law; "but I cannot resist the opportunity to tell my mind to this miscreant who is now seeking to deprive us of our bread."—And before I had time to utter another word, George was gliding rapidly but almost noiselessly up the craggy side of the chalk-pit, holding by the furze that grew in thick strong bunches. I confess that a strong presentiment of evil struck terror to my soul; and I remained breathless and trembling, where he had left me, but gazing upwards with intense anxiety. 'Holloa!' suddenly exclaimed the Squire, who had remained for nearly three minutes on the top of the precipice after his gamekeeper had quitted him—most likely brooding over the new scheme of vengeance which his hateful mind had planned: 'holloa!' he said; 'who is there?'—'I, George Dalton!' cried my brother-in-law, suddenly leaping to within a few paces of where the Squire was standing, and confronting the bad man like a ghost rising from a grave in the presence of the murderer.—"And what the devil do you want here, scoundrel?" exclaimed the Squire.—"Rather what do you want, plotting against me still?" demanded George. "I overheard every word that passed between you and your vile agent; and if there was any doubt before as to your detestable malignity, there is none now."—"Listeners never hear any good of themselves," retorted the Squire; "and if I called you a rascal, as perhaps I might have done, I meant what I said, and you heard yourself mentioned by your proper name."—"Villain! miscreant!" cried George, now quite furious; "you shall no longer triumph over me!"—And in another moment they were locked in a firm embrace, but not of love; and in the next moment after that, they rolled over the edge of the precipice, down to within a few paces where I was standing.

"A scream of terror escaped me; for I thought that they must be killed. The Squire lay senseless; but George leapt upon his feet—and almost at the same instant a low moan denoted that his enemy was not dead.—"Thank God, murder has not been done!" I exclaimed.—"But murder *will* be done, Tim, this night," said George, in a voice not loud, but so terrible in its tone that it made my blood run cold in my veins. "Yes," he continued, "my mortal enemy is now in my power. For a long time have I brooded over the vengeance that I had resolved to take upon him when no one should be near to tell the tale; for you will not betray me, Tim—you will not give me up to the hangman on account of what I may do?"—"George, I implore you not to talk thus," I said, falling on my knees at his feet.—"As there is a living God, Tim, above us," said George, solemnly,

'if you attempt to thwart me, I will make away with you also!' And having thus spoken, he raised the Squire in his arms, while I still remained on my knees, horrified and speechless. Never, never shall I forget the feelings which then possessed me! The Squire recovered his senses, and exclaimed, 'Where am I? Who are you?'—"George Dalton, your mortal enemy," was the terrific reply.—"Oh! I recollect now," cried the Squire, wildly. 'But do not murder me!'—"Your last hour is come! and your death shall be as terrible as human revenge can render it!" said George, in a voice which I should not have recognised without a foreknowledge that it was actually he who was speaking.—"Mercy!" cried the Squire, as George dragged him away towards the middle of the pit.

"Oh!" then I divined the dread intent of my brother-in-law; but I could not move a hand to help, nor raise my voice to shout for assistance in behalf of the victim. There I remained on my knees—speechless, stupified, deprived of motion,—able only to exercise the faculty of sight; and that showed me a horrible spectacle! For, having half stunned the Squire with a fearful blow, inflicted with a lump of chalk, George dragged him towards the kiln in which the lime was still burning, diffusing a pale red glow immediately above. 'Mercy!' once more cried the Squire, recovering his senses a second time.—"Mercy! miscreant," exclaimed George; "what mercy have you ever shown to me?" and, as he uttered these words, he hurled his victim, or rather his oppressor, into the burning pit! There was a shriek of agony—but it was almost immediately stifled; and the lurid glow became brighter, and the form of my brother-in-law seemed to expand and grow vast to my affrighted view; so that he appeared some dreadful fiend bending over the fiery receptacle for damned souls!

"Still was I a motionless, speechless, stupified spectator of that horrible tragedy, at a distance of about twenty yards. But no words can describe the dreadful feelings that seized upon me, when I suddenly beheld an object reach the top of the burning kiln, and cling there for an instant, until George Dalton with his foot thrust him back—for that object was indeed the Squire—into the fiery tomb! Then a film came rapidly over my eyes—my head seemed to swim round—and I fell back senseless. I was aroused by a sensation of violent shaking, and, on opening my eyes, I saw George Dalton bending over me. I shuddered fearfully—for all the particulars of the dreadful deed so recently performed, rushed to my mind with overwhelming force; and I remember that I clasped my hands together in an agonising manner, exclaiming, 'My God! George, how could you do it?'—"Tim," he replied, 'I do not repent what I have done. Human endurance could not stand more. If I had to live the last hour over again, I would act in the same manner. Your father—my father—and my child, were all as good as murdered by that man: and he has deserved death. Death he has met at last; and the sweetest moments I ever tasted were when I saw him crawling painfully up from the smouldering bottom of the pit, with his flesh all scorched, his clothes singed to tinder, and his face awfully disfigured,—clinging, too, with his burnt hands to the burning lime, and too wretched—yes, too full of horror, even to utter a moan. Then I kicked him back, and I watched his writhings till

all was over. He died with difficulty, Tim; and my only regret is that he was not ten hours in the tortures of that death, instead of as many minutes. But, come, get off your knees, and let us be going. I do not ask you whether you mean to tell of me, because that would not prevent you if you have the intention.—‘George, do you think it possible!’ I exclaimed, scarcely able to recover from the horrid sensations which were excited by the cold, implacable manner in which he had described the dying efforts and agonies of his enemy.—‘Well, Tim,’ he said, ‘I don’t ask you for any promises: you can do as you like. One thing is very certain, I could never harm you; and so, if you do take it into your head to turn round upon me, you would be treating me as I never should treat you. Let us say no more about it; and if you can keep a composed countenance before the women, do.’

“We left the pit; and when we reached the top, George said, ‘You go one way, and I will go another. If you are met out late by any one, you would not be suspected; but I should—and I would not involve you in any danger by your being seen with me; for, remember Tim,’ he added, as we were about to separate, ‘if I should happen to be caught out, I shall never say that you were present. And now get home as soon as you can; and say that you left work an hour ago, but that you took a walk, or something of that kind, before you went home. You can also seem surprised that I have not yet come back: that is, if I don’t get home before you.’ We parted, and I took the nearest road to the village, which I reached a little after eleven. Marion and my mother were rather uneasy at our absence; and I was quite unable to master my feelings so far as to appear composed and comfortable. Indeed, they were already overwhelming me with questions, when George made his appearance. I was astonished to see how happy he appeared: there was, positively, a glow of animation in his countenance, as if he had done some admirable deed. Somehow or another, his good spirits were catching; and I began to think that an admirable deed had really been accomplished, in ridding the earth of a monster whose delight was to crush and oppress the poor. George said that he had been to deliver some message to the owner of the kiln, after he had separated from me; and that made him so late. I had already stated that I had taken a good long walk, and our tales were believed. But, when the two women retired to rest, and George and I were left alone for a few minutes, his manner suddenly changed, as he said in a hoarse, low whisper, ‘Tim, there is danger menacing me. A few minutes after you and I parted, I met the Squire’s game-keepers near the pit, as they were going their rounds on account of the poachers; and they recognised me. My only chance of safety is in the probability that the lime will consume the body entirely. At all events I shall be the first at the pit in the morning.’ I was horror-struck at what he told me, and conjured him to seek safety by flight; but he declared his resolution to await the issue of events, and trust to fortune. He said that he felt perfectly happy in having wreaked his vengeance upon the Squire, and should not experience other feelings, were he on the scaffold. He then rose and went to join Marion, while I prepared to spread my bed as usual on the floor of our little parlour.

“It was not yet day-light when I was awakened

by hearing a noise in the room; and on inquiry, I found that it was George, about to sally forth, as he had intimated to me on the preceding night. I offered to get up and accompany him; but he said, ‘Not for the world, Tim. Should any thing happen to me, you must be at least safe, for those poor creatures of women cannot be left without a friend and protector.’ He then left the room, and in a few moments I heard the street-door closing gently. I lay down again and tried to sleep, but could not. An indescribable feeling of uneasiness was upon me, and I found myself, even against my will, balancing and calculating the chances for or against the detection of the murder. At length my mind was worked up to such a pitch of excitement that I could remain in bed no longer; and I rose and dressed myself. Having opened the shutters, I found that the day was just breaking. I cleared away the bedding, and laid the breakfast-table, as was my custom. Presently my mother and Marion made their appearance; and we sat down to the morning meal. But I could eat nothing; and my uneasiness was soon perceived. ‘Tim,’ said Marion, ‘there is something upon your mind: I know there is. You cannot conceal it; and if you deny it, you will not be speaking the truth. In the name of heaven, tell me what grieves you! And why has George gone out so unusually early and without his breakfast this morning?’—I assured both my sister and mother that there was nothing the matter with me, and that George had merely gone out early to do a good day’s work, as he hoped to get an increase of wages. Marion was not satisfied; but she saw that it was useless to question me, at least before our mother: accordingly, when the latter left the room after breakfast, my sister again urged me to make her acquainted with the cause of the secret anxiety which she knew was preying upon me. I renewed my protestations that she was mistaken. ‘Well, Tim,’ she said in her quiet, plaintive manner, while her blue eyes filled with tears, ‘if any thing should happen, the blow will be certain to kill me, because I shall be unprepared for it.’—For a few moments I hesitated whether I would confide to her the terrific secret of the murder; but I had not the courage, and hurried away to join my brother-in-law at the kiln.

“As I passed through the village, with my pickaxe on my back, I met a person whom I knew. ‘Splint,’ said he, ‘have you heard any thing?’—I know that I turned deadly pale, as I stammered out, ‘No, nothing particular.’—He did not notice my change of countenance, but added, ‘The Squire is missing, and foul play is suspected. That is all I have heard. But where is George?’—‘Why should you instantly ask that question, after mentioning the report about Squire Bulkeley?’ I asked; and it was with the utmost difficulty that I could restrain my feelings so as to speak in a manner at all composed.—‘Oh! only because if any thing should be wrong, you know, I am afraid that George Dalton would be suspected first; as every one is aware that he is no friend to the Squire;’—and the man passed on his way, not having intended to say any thing cruel or cutting, for he was a good kind of a fellow. My alarms increased; and I felt so terribly uneasy, that I knew not whether to throw down my pickaxe and run away altogether, or whether I should proceed to the chalk-pit. But while I was still weighing in my mind all the chances for and against detection, I came within sight of the fatal spot where the

deadful murder had been perpetrated. There was the height from which my brother-in-law and the Squire had rolled down, so firmly locked in each other's hostile embrace: there was the chimney of the kiln, in the burning-pit of which the wretched man had endured such fearful agonies before death released him!

"I know not how it was—but, though I really wished to fly from the fatal spot, some strange influence urged me on, or rather attracted me thither. When I reached a point from which I could command a view of the depths of the chalk-pit, an icy chill struck to my heart. George was in the grasp of the Squire's two principal gamekeepers; and the labourers of the pit were gathered round the mouth of the kiln, in a manner which convinced me that they had made some discovery. At that instant the words which George had addressed to me that morning, flashed back to mind—'*Should any thing happen to me, you must be at least safe, for these poor creatures of women cannot be left without a friend and protector.*'—My soul recovered all its power, and I felt that the truth of those words was strong indeed. Yes—what would become of my poor mother and the unhappy Marion, if both of their protectors were snatched away from them? Never was presence of mind more necessary. With a firm step I descended the sloping path leading into the pit, and affected extreme surprise when I beheld George in the custody of the gamekeepers. A rapid but significant glance on his part encouraged me to maintain the part I was playing; and fortunately no one suspected that a mere lad of fifteen or sixteen like me had any hand in the dreadful deed of which there was now evidence to prove the perpetration. It was however with no affected horror that I gathered from the hurried words of the labourers the particulars of the discovery. It appeared that the absence of the Squire from home all night had created an alarm; and this was augmented when it was ascertained that the Squire had been with one of his gamekeepers at the chalk-pit, and that half an hour afterwards this same keeper and another had encountered George Dalton in the same vicinity. The gamekeepers, finding that the Squire had not returned home all night, repaired direct to the chalk-works, where they found George Dalton had just arrived; and the dawn of day showed them enough at the bottom of the lime-pit to convince them that murder had been perpetrated. To the questions put to him by those who arrested him, George replied that he had parted from me at about a quarter to ten o'clock on the previous evening—that I had returned home—and that he had remained behind to finish his work;—but he denied having seen the Squire at all.

"I may as well state now, although I was not aware of the fact till some hours later on that terrible day, that the Squire's bailiff had been sent for the moment George was arrested and the murder was discovered; and that, having heard George's answers to the questions put to him, he set off for the village by a short cut over the Bulkeley estate; whereas I took the main road to the pit, and therefore had not met him. It appears that on his arrival at the village, the bailiff went straight to our lodgings, and began to question Marion and her mother as to whether George had been home at all during the night; and if so, at what hour he had returned. Marion named the hour at which he had

returned; adding, that he was so late because he had been, on leaving off work, to deliver a message to the owner of the chalk-pit. The bailiff then brutally revealed the whole terrible truth to the two females; and though I was not there to witness the same, yet it is easy to believe that it was terrible and heart-rending indeed. But, heedless of the misery which his abrupt discourse had produced, the bailiff hastened off to the owner of the chalk-pit, and learnt from him that George had *not* been near him on the preceding evening. Back to the pit went the bailiff, now accompanied by its owner; and the next step was to convey the prisoner before the nearest magistrate, who happened to be the rector of the parish. I was desired to go with the party; but no suspicion was attached to me. It was proved that the calcined remains of a human body were found in the hole where the lime was burnt; and that the metal buttons picked up were those which belonged to the coat the Squire had on the previous evening. I need not detail the nature of the evidence which appeared to tell against George Dalton; because you can well understand it from all the circumstances I have already related. He conducted himself with wonderful calmness and presence of mind throughout the long examination, which lasted for several hours; and when the magistrate asked him if he had any thing to say in his defence, or to show why he should not be committed for trial, he answered in a firm tone, 'I am innocent, and have nothing more to say.' He was accordingly committed for trial—handcuffs were put upon him; and he was removed to an out-house, guarded by constables, until a cart could be got in readiness to convey him to the County Gaol.

"But in the yard of the rector's abode a heart-rending scene took place. Marion was there, waiting to see her husband, of whose guilt *she*, poor thing! could entertain no doubt. She had left our mother, who had fallen down in a fit when the disclosure was so rudely made by the bailiff, to the care of the landlady of the house in which we lived; and, crushed with deep affliction—weak—sickly—almost heart-broken as she was, she had dragged herself to the place where she heard the examination was going on. 'Oh! George, George!' she exclaimed, as she rushed forward to embrace her husband, whose manacles rattled, as, forgetting that he wore them, he endeavoured to extend his arms to receive her. How poor Marion wept!—what convulsive sobs escaped her bosom! George wept also; but he said every thing fond and endearing to console her. The parson-justice appeared at the door of his house; and, perceiving the sad spectacle, said, 'Take that woman away: I will not have such scenes under my windows. She is no doubt as bad as he.'—Never shall I forget the look of imploring anguish which Marion turned towards that minister of the Gospel, who spoke so sternly and so unjustly; then, in the next moment, she fell senseless upon the ground. The constables rushed upon George to drag him off to the out-house: but he hurled them away, manacled as he was, crying in a voice that struck terror to my soul, 'I will not move an inch till I see this poor innocent creature properly cared for. Keep off—or I shall do *another murder*!'—'Another murder!' exclaimed the rector: 'then he confesses that of the Squire!'—But George heard not the observation; nor did he seem to notice the tremendous oversight which he had committed in the be-

wildering anguish of the moment. Bending over Marion, he raised her with his chained hands, while one of the rector's servants, more humane than his master, brought out water to sprinkle upon her countenance. At length she slowly opened her eyes; and George, beckoning to me, said, 'Now, Tim, take her away: I cannot bear this scene any more.'—I approached, and lent my support to poor Marion, while George, of his own accord, hurried to the out-house, not once casting a look behind him.

"I know not how I got my wretched sister home;—and I was nearly as wretched as herself. But at length we reached our humble lodging, where the landlady, who appeared to be the only friend left to us in the world, did all she could to console the miserable young wife. Had it not been for that kind-hearted woman, we must all have perished through sheer want; for I received notice from the owner of the chalk-pit that my services would be dispensed with in future, and no one else would give me work. A week after George's committal, my mother died; and she, who was once the wife of a farmer well-to-do in the world, was now buried at the expense of the parish! When the funeral was over, and Marion grew somewhat more composed, she insisted upon removing to Winchester, so as to be near the gaol wherein her husband lay. 'If we go,' said I, 'we must beg our way.'—'Then we will beg our way, Tim,' answered Marion; 'for, whether innocent or guilty, George is my husband, and I can never cease to love him.'—I offered no farther remonstrance; so, bidding our kind landlady farewell, we set out, with only half-a-crown in our pockets; and for that sum we were indebted to that same good landlady.

"On our arrival at Winchester, we took a small lodging near the gaol; and Marion went to see her husband. She insisted upon going alone, and I did not thwart her in any of her wishes. When she returned to me, she seemed a little more tranquil than she had yet been since the dreadful disclosure of George's arrest on an accusation of murder. She was consoled by having seen her husband, although she could not do otherwise than believe him guilty. But of that she never spoke to me; and I was very careful not to touch upon the point. I now tried to obtain work; but, at some places where I applied, *character* was inquired about, and at others no assistance was wanted. At last I was actually compelled to go into the streets and beg, for Marion was attacked with severe indisposition. One evening, as I was returning home without having succeeded in obtaining a single halfpenny all day long, and in a state bordering on despair, I was warned by a beadle that if I was seen begging in the streets again, I should be taken up as a rogue and vagabond. Frightened by his threats, I hurried away, and was already in sight of the house in which we lived, and where I had left my poor sister in the morning, when, by the light streaming from a shop-window, I saw an old gentleman drop something on the ground as he drew out his pocket-handkerchief. He went on without noticing the occurrence; and I picked up the object, which proved to be his purse. Gold glittered through the net-work at one end—silver was in the other. I ran after the gentleman as hard as I could, hoping to receive a reward for my trouble; but I could not find him. Thinking he had entered some house in the street,

I waited for nearly an hour—but still he appeared not. It came on to rain hard: I was soon wet through to the skin, for my clothes were old and tattered; and the pangs of hunger were now dreadful. The idea of using a small portion of the money in the purse, by degrees grew stronger and stronger in my mind. I thought of poor Marion, who was famished as well as myself;—the temptation was too strong—and I yielded. Rushing to a baker's shop, I procured bread: thence I proceeded to a general-dealer's, and purchased a little tea, sugar, butter, and other necessities. I then returned home, and told Marion that a charitable gentleman had given me half-a-crown, and that I was also promised work. 'Alas! my poor brother,' she said, 'you are compelled to think of supporting me as well as yourself: but it will not be for long, Tim,' she added: 'I feel it *there* now,'—and she touched her forehead,—'as well as *here*,'—and she placed her hand on her heart.—I burst into tears, and implored her not to talk in that mournful way. She shook her head, sighing piteously—but said nothing.

"Next day I went out and remained absent until night. When I came home again I said that I had obtained work, at the rate of two shillings a day, and was to be paid every evening. So I laid two shillings on the table. I forgot to observe that the purse contained about eleven pounds in gold and silver; and I was determined to dole it out in such a way that Marion should not suspect me of deceiving her. As often as the gaol regulations would permit, she visited her husband; for the little comforts which I was now able to provide for her, restored her strength in a trifling degree—at all events, sufficiently so to enable her to drag her drooping form along to the dungeon which held all she deemed most dear. Once only did I see George before the day of his trial; for Marion preferred to visit him alone. He was greatly affected at beholding us together, and thanked me for my kindness towards my sister.

"At last, after the lapse of about three months, the Assizes commenced; and on the second day the trial came on. George had counsel to defend him; for I supplied the means from the purse, having invented some tale to account for the possession of the requisite sum to fee the barrister, so that Marion was satisfied. It was with the greatest difficulty that I could persuade her to remain at home during the proceedings, at which I was compelled to be present as a witness. I need not detail all the particulars of the evidence given against my unhappy brother-in-law: circumstances all told in his disfavour, and the observation which he had let slip, '*I shall do another murder*,' was made the most of by the counsel for the prosecution. I was examined, and I swore that I had quitted the prisoner at the lime-kiln at a quarter to ten on the night in question. It was proved that it was not until *past* ten that the game-keeper accompanied the Squire to the neighbourhood of the fatal place; and therefore no questions were put likely to embarrass me. The counsel for the defence argued most ingeniously in George's favour; but the Judge summed up against him.* The Jury did not deliberate ten

* It is generally understood that the Judge should be merely an expounder of the law affecting the cases brought under the cognizance of the court, and also a means of refreshing the memories of the jurymen by reading over his notes, or the salient points in them.



minutes; and the verdict was *Guilty*! George was standing in the dock all the time that the Jury were whispering together and when the foreman pronounced his doom; and a slight muscular twitching of the lips was the only sign of emotion. The Judge put on the black cap,* and sentenced him to death

in the usual horrible terms. I must confess that, though I had but little room in my soul for reflection of any kind—so much was it occupied with the one dreadful fact of the day—I shuddered and looked with loathing upon the Judge—to hear that old man, himself having one foot in the grave,

At least, to our thinking, a Judge should never allow his own opinion on the point at issue to transpire. If he do, he is almost sure to bias the jury. But, unfortunately, nearly all the Judges in this country act in a dictatorial manner with regard to juries. They direct the verdicts returned. This assumption on the part of the Judges of the privileges and attributes of juries, renders the latter perfectly unnecessary. For ourselves, we believe that trial by jury is in these islands a mere farce—an idle mockery—a contemptible delusion: the Judges are the real juries after all. And yet we boast of the institution! That institution would indeed be a glorious one, were the Judges to discharge their duties properly. *but, in nine cases out of ten, they do not.*

* There is something uncommonly barbarous in many of our institutions and customs. Were it not associated with such solemn occasions, we should laugh at the mountebank piece of solemn humbug of the black cap—as if the Judge himself could not assume

a demeanour serious and dignified enough for the awful and atrocious duty which the law imposes upon him in pronouncing death sentences. The custom of Judges and barristers disfiguring themselves in huge wigs is a mere relic of barbarism, and unworthy of a civilized age. If the law cannot maintain its solemn majesty without such wretched aids, heaven knows there must be something radically wrong either in the constitution of the tribunals themselves or in the conduct of the functionaries of justice. Away with all such mockeries and fools'-play as wigs and black caps, and let men distribute the justice of men as men, and not muffled up and disguised like old women. The maintenance of all customs which our barbarian ancestors handed down to us shows an aversion to progress on the part of the Government and the Legislature. The wisdom of those ancestors existed, we imagine, only in the wig. Let the wisdom of the present day show itself by the fact of discarding all useless pomp and vain ostentation.

uttering such a disgusting, cruel, and inhuman sentence as this:—*'You shall be taken back to the place whence you came, and thence to a place of execution, where you shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead'* Then, when man has done his worst, and will not forgive nor attempt to reform the criminal, the awful atrocity concludes with the damnable mockery—*'And may the Lord have mercy upon your soul'* I call it a mockery, because it is insulting to heaven to invoke that pity and compassion which human beings so positively refuse. But then the old Judge was a mere mouthpiece through which the blood-thirsty law spoke; and he was compelled to do a duty for which he was so well paid. Still I loathed that old man who could *sell* his feelings for money, and who could be allured by the temptation of a large income to undertake an office which constrained him to doom his fellow-creatures to die the deaths of mere dogs. I wondered whether he could sleep comfortably in his bed afterwards, and I thought at the time that I would sooner be the veriest beggar crawling on the face of the earth, than a Judge with all his money—all the respect shown to him—and all his titles of Lordship!

"But I have wandered away from my subject. Poor George was removed from the dock:—I mean, he accompanied the turnkeys back to the gaol; for he walked as firmly as I could do at this moment. I now had a most dreadful duty to perform—to convey the result to Marion. But I hastened back to her, fearful lest she should learn that result from lips which might not break the horrible tidings slowly to her. When I entered the garret where I had left her, I found her on her knees praying aloud and fervently. The sight was too much for me; and I burst into tears. She rose slowly, took me by the hand, and said, 'Tim—dear Tim, you need not attempt to *break it gently to me*, as I know you have come to do. I feel—something tells me, indeed—that it is all over: and I have been long prepared for this awful moment! I have never allowed myself to indulge in vain hopes. The world, I was convinced, would persecute my poor husband until it drove him to—but I cannot, cannot say where! That he was guilty of the deed, Tim, I have known all along; and, dreadful as that deed was, I could not reproach him for it. He was goaded to desperation by wrong heaped upon wrong; and, instead of being treated as a criminal, he should be looked upon as a victim himself.'—Marion had spoken with an unnatural calmness, which made me tremble lest her reason was deserting her; but when she had concluded her address to me, she threw herself into my arms, and burst into a violent flood of weeping. I endeavoured to console her: she grew frantic. The command which she had maintained over herself throughout that dreadful day, and in the solitude of that garret, had tried her powers of endurance too severely; and now that her long pent-up anguish burst forth, it was awful in the extreme. 'Oh! my God!' I exclaimed; 'what have we done that we should be thus tortured on earth, as if we were in hell?'—and then I thought of the crime I had committed in appropriating the contents of the purse to my own use—and I felt ashamed. But in a few moments other feelings came over me: it struck me that there was *no use in being good*. Old Dalton—my father—my mother—poor Marion—and, until the date of that

one deed, myself,—none of us had ever been wicked—and yet, how awfully had we suffered. The three first had positively been *killed* by misfortune. And George too,—there was not a more upright, honourable, generous-hearted man in existence than he, until oppression and cruel wrong wrought a change in his nature. Such were my thoughts; and again I asked myself, what was the use of being good? From that moment I determined to do as I saw the world doing around me.

"The execution was fixed for the second Thursday after the trial, which took place on a Tuesday; and during the interval Marion saw her husband three times. I accompanied her on each occasion; for I was afraid to allow her to venture out alone. George maintained his courage in an astonishing manner; but never alluded to the crime in our presence. He showed the greatest affection towards his wife, and the warmest attachment for me; and implored her not to give way more than she could help to grieve on his account. The third interview was on the evening previous to the fatal day; and that was heart-rending indeed. Marion, no longer resigned and enduring, was absolutely frantic; and she was borne away, leaving wildly, from the condemned cell. I managed to get her home; and some female lodgers in the same house put her to bed. A surgeon was sent for, and he pronounced her to be in the greatest danger. I sat up with her all that night, throughout which she slept at intervals, awaking to rave after her '*dear murdered husband*.' Had she not been my sister, I never could have supported the horrors of that awful night. Towards morning she seemed quite exhausted, and fell into a deep slumber. The execution was to take place at twelve precisely; and I hoped, sincerely hoped, that she might sleep until all should be over. Hour after hour passed—eleven o'clock struck, and still she slept. Every now and then she started convulsively, and murmured the name of her husband. Oh! how anxiously did I then wait for the chimes that proclaimed the quarters! and how slowly went the time! 'Poor George! what are your feelings now?' I kept repeating to myself. A quarter past—half-past eleven,—a quarter to twelve,—these had all struck, and still she slept. As I sat by her bedside, I could hear the rushing crowds in the street below; and I also heard all the lodgers hastening down the stairs to witness the execution! But still Marion slept; and, in the bitterness of my own grief, this circumstance was a slight consolation.

"At length the chimes announced the hour—the fatal hour! Scarcely had they done playing, when Marion awoke with a sudden start, and raised herself to a sitting posture in the bed. Wildly she glanced around—and again she started fearfully as, the chimes being over, the clock began to strike the hour. '*One—two—three*,' she began in a tone of piercing anguish; and on she went counting the strokes till her tongue had numbered *twelve*! 'My God! 'tis the hour!' she exclaimed, with a dreadful shriek; then extending her arms wildly, she cried, 'I come, George—I come!' and fell back heavily in the bed, as if shot through the heart. She was no more!

"It appeared that the drop fell about half a minute after the last stroke of twelve; and, therefore, by a strange chance, poor George must have breathed his last almost at the very instant when Marion uttered those words so wildly—'*I come! I come!*'—

Thus died my persecuted brother-in-law and my poor sister; and I was now left alone—friendless—unprotected in the wide world.

“A strange whim now suddenly entered my head: I would bury the remains of the ill-fated couple in the same grave! Such was my idea; and so determined was I to carry it into execution that I set out deliberately and calmly for the purpose of robbing some one to obtain the means for the purpose. When I got into the street I found the crowds dispersing after having witnessed the execution of my brother-in-law. How I loathed the inhuman creatures, who had shown such eager curiosity to view the last struggles of a man hung up like a dog by the blood-thirsty mandates of the law! Some were laughing and joking together as they walked along; and such observations as these caught my ears—‘How game he died, didn’t he?’—‘That Jack Ketch is a devilish clever fellow at his business!’—‘It was the best turn-off I have seen for a long time.’—‘I propose that we can’t go to work to-day. Let’s make a holiday of it?’ For my part, I never fail to attend all executions that take place in the county, and I always look upon it as a holiday; just like Easter Monday or Whit Monday for instance.’—‘What fun it was to see that old chap whom I bonneted in the crowd! How he did curse and swear just as the parson was reading the last prayer on the scaffold!’—‘I never had such a jolly good lark in my life. I had my arm round Tom Piffin’s wife’s waist all the time.’—‘What a precious sight of pickpockets there was in the crowd!’—These, and a hundred other observations of the same kind, met my ears as I walked along the streets through which the people were returning from the execution. At length I passed the door of a public news-room; and there several gentlemen were standing, in conversation, about the hideous spectacle, which one of them had witnessed, and which this individual was describing with wonderful minuteness to his companions. I pretended to be looking at some pictures in the shop-window, but was in reality surveying the group, thinking that one of them might become paymaster (though against his will) for the funeral of my sister and brother-in-law.—‘You don’t mean to say that the woman really did it?’ cried one of the gentlemen.—‘I mean to say,’ answered the person who had witnessed the execution, ‘that immediately after the criminal was dead, or rather as soon as he had ceased to struggle, the woman went up on the scaffold and the executioner put the murderer’s hand upon her face to cure the King’s evil; and when she had gone down again, a countryman ascended to the platform, and was touched in the same way for a wen which he had got upon his head. I saw it all myself.’—‘Well, I could scarcely believe it,’ said the other gentleman who had spoken.—‘I will lay you ten guineas,’ exclaimed the one who had witnessed the execution, ‘that if you ask any other person who was present, he will tell you the same thing: and, thus speaking, the gentleman drew out his purse. His friend, however, declined the wager; and the purse was re-consigned to the pocket, but not before I had seen enough of it to convince me that its contents were worth having. I felt the less remorse in robbing that man, because he had described, with such methodical cold-bloodedness, all the minute details of the execution; and, availing myself of an opportunity when the group had got deep into a loud and excited discourse on the incidents of touching for the King’s evil and the wen, I managed to extract the purse in even a far more skilful manner

than I had expected. The robbery was not immediately perceived, and I got clear away.

“On returning to my miserable garret, and by the side of the bed whereon lay the remains of my once beautiful and amiable sister, I counted the contents of the purse. ‘Eleven guineas!’ I murmured to myself; and, as I glanced tremblingly at the corpse, it actually seemed to me at the moment as if an expression of deep gloom and sorrow suddenly passed over its countenance. ‘Oh! my sister—my dear sister!’ I cried; ‘I have done it for your sake!’—and then, unable to remain any longer near one who seemed to reproach me even in death, I hurried away to the prison to claim the body of my brother-in-law. This request was granted without difficulty; and in the course of the day the husband and wife lay together upon the same bed—side by side—motionless, white, and cold,—the former murdered by the law, the latter by cruel wrong and diabolical oppression. The undertaker had received my instructions, and the preparations for the funeral were in progress. But two nights did I pass in the same room with those dead bodies; for, although I was afraid, yet something seemed to whisper to me within, that it would be heartless and cruel to abandon even those inanimate remains until the grave should close over them! And as I sat by their side, while a candle burnt dimly on the table, I thought to myself, ‘All this tremendous amount of sorrow, calamity, and woe has been caused by a wealthy and unprincipled landlord! Had it not been for Squire Bulkeley, those two would still have been alive, and would have been happy, prosperous, and useful to society. But the tenant or the small landowner has no chance against the proprietor of great estates, if the latter chooses to be a tyrant. The herring has as much right as the whale to swim in the waters which God has made; and yet the whale swallows up the herring! So is it with the great and the small landholder!’

“Well, the funeral took place—and there were four mourners, one real and three sham. The real one was myself—the three sham were the undertaker and two of his dependants. Nevertheless, my aim was accomplished: George and his wife slept in the same grave; and the money of a man who had greedily devoured the hideous spectacle of public strangulation had served to bury them! In spite of my grief I chuckled at this idea; it seemed something like retributive justice. I had now no object in staying at Winchester; and, with eleven shillings in my pocket, I set out to walk to London. During my journey I passed the chalk-pit where the dreadful deed had taken place—I passed it purposely, because I now wanted to harden my mind as much as possible, for I saw it was no use for a poor friendless orphan like me to think of being honest. In the most civilised country (as it is called) in the world, I had seen such abominable acts of oppression perpetrated, under colour of law, that I envied those naked savages in islands a great way off of whom I had read in books; for *I thought that it was better to be barbarians without the pretence of civilisation, than to be barbarians with that pretence.* I had heard a great deal said by my father, by old Mr. Dalton, and also by the clergyman from the pulpit, about the paternal nature of the English Government; but I now began to perceive that it had been mere delusion on the part of my well-meaning parent and Mr. Dalton, and rank hypocrisy and wanton deception on the part of the parson. All I could now think of the paternal Government was, that it favoured insti-

tutions by means of which poor men might be driven to desperation, and then they were coolly and quietly hanged for the deeds to the perpetration of which they had been so goaded. I began to look upon the English people as the most chicken-hearted and contemptible nation in the world for allowing the aristocracy to ride rough-shod over them; whereas the great and high-minded French people, as I had read in books, had risen up like one man and overthrown their aristocracy altogether.* But let me continue my

* "The Aristocracy of England, a History for the People," by John Hampden, Junior (the pseudonym of a very clever writer, whatever his real name and whom he may be) is a work which should be read by all classes—by the aristocratic sections of society, because it may warn them of the impending storm; and by the middle and poorer grades, because it will show them their oppressors in their true characters. This and William Howitt's "History of Priestcraft" (both published by Messrs. Chapman, Newgate Street) are glorious signs of the times in which we live. From the first-mentioned book we quote the ensuing passage:—

"Look at France. Every one is familiar with the dreadful condition to which its proud and imbecile aristocracy reduced it. Every one knows in what a storm of blood and terror the oppressed people rose and took an eternal vengeance on their oppressors. If we read the accounts of France, just previous to the Revolution, we cannot avoid being struck with a terrible similarity of circumstances and features with those of our own country now. Nay, the following description by their own historian, Thiers, seems to be that of England at present:—'The condition of the country, both political and economical, was intolerable. There was nothing but privilege—privilege vested in individuals, in classes, in towns, in provinces, and even in trades and professions. Every thing contributed to check industry and the natural genius of man. All the dignities of the state, civil, ecclesiastical, and military, were exclusively reserved to certain individuals. No man could take up a profession without certain titles, and the compliance with certain pecuniary conditions. Even the favours of the crown were converted into family property, so that the king could scarcely exercise his own judgment, or give any preference. Almost the only liberty left to the sovereign was that of making pecuniary gifts, and he had been reduced to the necessity of disputing with the Dukes of Cognac for the abolition of a useless place. Every thing, then, was made unmovable property in the hands of a few, and every where these few resisted the many who had been despoiled. The burdens of the state weighed on one class only. The noblesse and the clergy possessed about two-thirds of the landed property; the other third, possessed by the people, paid taxes to the king, a long list of feudal *droits* to the noblesse, tithes to the clergy, and had, moreover, to support the devastations committed by noble sportsmen and then game. The taxes upon consumption pressed upon the great multitude, and consequently on the people. The collection of these impost was managed in an unfair and irritating manner; the lords of the soil left long arrears with impunity, but the people, upon any delay in payment, were harshly treated, arrested and condemned to pay in their persons, in default of money to produce. The people, therefore, nourished with their labour, and defended with their blood, the higher classes of society, without being able to procure a comfortable subsistence for themselves. The towns-people, a body of citizens, industrious, educated, less miserable than the people, could nevertheless obtain none of the advantages to which they had a right to aspire, seeing that it was their industry that nourished and their talents that adorned the kingdom.'—Is not that a wonderful fac-simile of our own present condition? But these circumstances produced revolution in France; what will they produce here! If they are allowed to continue they will produce the very same thing. The French historians assert, that had the cries of the people been listened to before they grew maddened with their miseries, there would have been reform instead of revolution, and their nation would have been spared the years of unexampled horror and self-laceration through which it had to wade. Now is the same saving crisis with us! The people, the most industrious of them in town and country, starve by tens of thousands, or lead a

history. Having passed by the chalk-pit—the fata chalk-pit—I visited the immediate neighbourhood of

sort of half-life in incessant labour, rags, and hunger. All parts of our social system call out for relief. The manufacturer, the farmer, equally complain; the agricultural labourers are reduced to a condition worse than serfdom—to a condition of unparalleled destitution, and in some districts gangs of them are driven to the field, as we learn from parliamentary reports, under gang-masters, and are lodged promiscuously like cattle—men, women, and children, in temporary booths, fitter for beasts than human beings. In many parts of this once happy country the agricultural labourers are getting but five and six shillings per week; while they are asked 8l an acre for bits of land to set a few potatoes on."

The author of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON" would not have his readers imagine him to be in favour of "physical force." No—we abhor war even with foreign powers, but no words are strong enough to express our loathing and abhorrence of the bare idea of that infernal scourge—a civil war. Another quotation from the work of John Hampden, Junior, will serve to express also our opinions on the point:—

"The neglect of the public interest it extends to the whole frightful mass of *delegated taxation*, under which the nation groans, even more heavily than under the direct national imposts. The reviewer justly remarks that the maxim of legislators is 'Every one for himself, and the public for us all!' But could this state of things possibly exist if Englishmen did their duty, if they resolved to do their own public business, as they do their private—to do it themselves, and not foolishly intrust to men who have shown themselves at once so incapable and so unworthy of trust in every respect? Is there any reason why the people of England, who conduct their commerce, their manufactures, their domestic trade and affairs so admirably, should not conduct the affairs of their government just as well if they were to set about it? Is there any reason that a man who guides a ship round the world, clear of rocks and breakers, should not as well help to steer the vessel of state? Why should not he who governs a steam-engine just as well govern or assist in governing a country? The great Oxenstierna, Chancellor of Sweden, said to his son, 'Mark, my son, with what a small stock of talent a nation may be governed.' But our aristocracy have for ages demonstrated that they do not even possess this 'small stock of talent,' or of as much honesty; and the remedy for the evils they have covered us with is as clear as the daylight:—*The power must be wrested from them!*' But how? By arms? No: Englishmen know too well the dangers of revolution: they have too much to lose, and they have too much humanity. The soil of England will not willingly drink in the blood of its children, as in the barbarous ages, the remedy is alike simple and conspicuous. It lies in one joint rising and stern demand of all and every class in the country. All—manufacturers and farmer, gentleman and ploughman, merchant and shopman, artisan and labourer—all must combine, and with one dread voice, like another Cromwell, command the aristocrats to quit the people's house, and 'give place to better men.' This is the simple and sole remedy. A thousand evils are complained of: 'The whole head is sick and the whole heart is sore,' but 'THE GREAT ROOT OF ALL' is the usurpation of the Commons House of Parliament by the aristocracy. One party proclaims that the whole people is corrupted by the bribery of these patrician senators, and demand the *universal franchise*, and in that they demand the true and only remedy. But because some are for this, and some for that, and do not all join in the hearty *rending shout* for the *FRANCHISE*—that magic word in which lies the constitution—that cure for all bribery (for who can bribe thirty millions of people)—that guarantee for the steady maintenance of the constitution—for, once in the hands of the totality, the totality will never relinquish it again—they cry, but they cry in vain. Till we obtain the *franchise* we obtain *nothing*; when we obtain that we obtain *every thing*. Every petition, every demand, however stern or resolved, that asks for any thing short of the *UNIVERSAL FRANCHISE*, is the preparation of an absurdity, and the greatest of all absurdities. He is just as wise who asks short of this, as if he prayed the Pope to abolish the Catholic religion, or a Jew to give you all he is worth. The aristocracy have usurped the House of Commons—for what? Just for this very purpose—of resisting the proper demands of the people—of maintaining and perpetuating all the evils

the farm-house where a happy family had once dwelt—my own! Now it was tenanted by strangers. I went on, and came to the house to which George Dalton had borne my sister Marion a blooming bride—that tenement was now deserted—and it struck horror to my heart to observe—or rather to *feel*—that death-like silence which pervaded a place where the joyous laugh of George Dalton and the musical voice of my dear sister had once been heard. O God! that so much misery should have fallen upon *two* families who strove so hard to live honestly and in peace with all mankind!

"The tears streamed down my face as I turned back into the high road and pursued my way towards London. I now thought, as I went along, that if I could, *possibly* obtain honest employment in the great city, honest I would endeavour to remain,—I say *remain*, because although I had committed two thefts, yet I was far from being utterly depraved. The tears which painful remembrances had called forth, had softened my heart; and the image of my lamented sister appeared to urge me to virtue. Armed with this resolution, I proceeded towards the metropolis. It was evening when, after two days' fatiguing journey, I entered London, and put up at a miserable lodging-house in the window of which I saw a bill stating that single men might have a bed for fourpence a night. Eight hours' good rest gave me strength and spirits to begin my search after employment. I went into the City and inquired at several warehouses if a light porter was wanted. Having met with many refusals, and being wearied with walking about, I went into a public-house to get some refreshment; and happening to mention my situation to the landlord, he very kindly recommended me to apply at a certain warehouse which he named and where he knew that a porter was wanted. I did so, and was fortunate enough to succeed in obtaining the place, with a salary of twelve shillings a week.

"I commenced my new avocation on the following morning, and exerted myself to the utmost to obtain the good opinion of my master. I was regular in the hours of attendance, and frequently remained behind at the office, when the clerks had departed, to finish the labours which had been assigned to me in the morning. I was economical and prudent in my expenditure; and the pittance which I received was ample to keep myself. At the expiration of four months from the time when I first entered this establishment, I had entirely gained the confidence of my employer. My salary was increased; and I began to think that

for whose removal you pray. It is true the people, combining on some great emergency—driven, as it were into this combination by some desperate pressure—may alarm the aristocracy into some individual concession, as in the case of the Reform Bill. But this is a stupendous exertion, a violent and convulsive sort of action in the political system, which wrests only, at the point of famine or national ruin, its own rights from the usurping party. Public opinion is said, in this country, to be the actual ruling power; but it is a fitful and irregular power. Like the Indian, or the boa-constructor, it is aroused to action only by hunger or imminent impending danger; at the smallest return of ease it pauses; it becomes drowsy again, and the mischief goes on for another period. If public opinion really rules, it should lift itself to the necessary height of command, and do its work effectually. That would save us all much trouble. There is but one perfect permanent remedy—but one means of absolute cure for our perpetually recurring evils: *We must have these usurpers out of the people's house, and rule in it ourselves! and this is to be done only by insisting on the franchise, the whole franchise, and nothing but the franchise.*"

fortune was once more inclined to smile upon me; when a circumstance occurred which convinced me that the long lane of life had not yet taken a turn. My employer one morning desired me to proceed to a particular address, at the West End of the Town, and insist upon the payment of a bill, which, in the course of business, had fallen into his hands, and which had been protested. I instantly set out for the place intimated; and, having inquired for the gentleman, whose name was familiar enough to me, though I could not suspect the identity which proved to be the case. I was shown into an elegant apartment, where a gentleman was sitting with his face to the fire and his back to the door, smoking a cigar. 'Who, the devil's that?' demanded the occupant of the room, without turning his head, but in a voice which was not unknown to me. 'If you're a dun, I aint at home.'—'I have called for payment—', I began.—'Holloa! who have we here?' ejaculated the gentleman; and, rising from his chair, he disclosed the features of the magistrate who had first committed George Dalton for poaching. 'What! Tim Splint!' he cried: 'is this you?'—'It is I, the brother-in-law of the man whom you helped to persecute,' I returned, equally surprised at this unexpected encounter.—'No impudence, my good fellow,' said the magistrate, very coolly; 'or else I shall be compelled to kick you out of the room. But what vulgar thing have you got in your hand there?'—'A bill, with your name to it, and the payment of which I am come to require, was my immediate answer.—'Oh! that's it—is it?' ejaculated the magistrate, casting his eyes over the document which I displayed to his view. 'Well, let me see, how shall I pay this? In Bank notes, or by kicking you out of the house, or by recommending the holder to read his bill again this day six months? Oh, I have it;'—and, sitting down to an elegant writing-table, he penned a hasty note, sealed it, and desired me to give it to the person who had sent me. I then withdrew, anxious to avoid a dispute which would be perfectly useless, and which would probably prejudice the interests of my employer. I returned to the office in the City, and delivered the note. The merchant opened it, and his countenance changed as he perused its contents. For some moments he remained absorbed in thought; and then, apparently acting in obedience to a sudden impulse, passed the note to me, who had been anxiously watching the strange demeanour of my master. The letter contained the following words:—'*Mr.—would be much obliged to the holder of his acceptance, for a hundred and sixty-eight pounds, if he would forbear from sending the brother of a man who has been hanged, to demand the amount, as such persons are by no means welcome at the abode of Mr.—, however well they may suit the holder of his bill. The meaning of this request would be ascertained, were the porter Timothy Splint, questioned as to his connexion with the murderer George Dalton.*'—I folded up the letter, returned it to my employer, and said, 'I cannot deny the truth of its contents; but I am innocent, although my poor brother-in-law died on the scaffold.'—'You should have been candid at the commencement,' interrupted my employer, firmly but mildly. 'Whether you are innocent or not, matters not now. Had you told me your real position when you first came to me, I should have admired your frankness, and given you a fair trial. As it is, we must part at once.'—I attempted to justify my silence respecting the ignominious end of my relative; but the merchant was inexorable in his determination not to hear any thing in

the shape of an explanation. He paid me the wages due to me, with a sovereign over, and dismissed me.

"I forthwith began to look after a new situation; and I remembered the parting words of the merchant whom I had left, resolving to be candid in the first instance, when soliciting a new place. My duties at my recent situation had compelled me to visit other mercantile firms on many occasions; and I had formed the acquaintance of several of the persons employed in those establishments. To some of them I repaired to ascertain where vacancies were to be filled up; and, having obtained a considerable list, I set out upon a round of applications. The first house I inquired at was that of a general merchant and warehousman, who required a porter and collector of monies.—'Have you ever served in that capacity before?' was the first demand.—'I was in the employ of a highly respectable merchant; I returned, mentioning his name, 'whose service I only left a few days ago.'—'I remember that you were engaged there; I thought you were familiar to me,' said the merchant. 'And I also recollect that I heard you spoken of in the highest possible terms,' he continued; 'indeed, you were represented to me as being invaluable in your particular department. But, of course, you did not leave your late employer for any misconduct on your part?'—'Not at all, sir,' was my answer. 'I must, however, explain a certain circumstance.—' 'Well, I will just send round, merely for the form's sake, you know, and ascertain that it is all right; and if you will call to-morrow morning, I have no doubt I shall be enabled to give you a favourable answer.'—'I must really, sir,' said I, 'speak to you very seriously for a moment before you take any trouble on my behalf. If you will have the kindness to listen to me, I shall explain my real position. The truth is, though perfectly innocent of any crime myself, I have the misfortune to be related to a persecuted man, who was driven by despair to commit a deed for which he suffered on the scaffold.'—'The scaffold!' ejaculated the merchant in dismay.—'Yes, sir,' I continued, hastily endeavouring to give a full explanation; 'and if you will but permit me to tell you in a few words the melancholy history, you will see no reason to be displeased with my candour. On the contrary, you will, I am sure, pity me, sir.'—'I thank you for such candour,' interrupted the merchant, buttoning up his breeches-pockets, and locking his desk; 'but I regret that, under circumstances, I cannot think of taking you into my service.'—'But do pray listen to me, sir,' I exclaimed; 'you are doubtless a man of sense, of justice, and of impartiality; and I appeal to you.'—'My good young man, it is no use to take up my time,' interrupted the merchant impatiently; 'I am certainly not going to receive you into my service, under existing circumstances.'

"I was compelled to take my departure. I left the house, ashamed and abashed—fearful that my evil doom was sealed—afraid to look those whom I met in the face—and fancying that every one seemed to know who and what I was. But a few moments' reflection taught me to believe that I had no reason to anticipate failure every where, because I had met with a repulse in one place. I accordingly proceeded to another establishment where a light porter was also required. The head of this firm was a venerable old man, with long grey hair falling over his coat-collar, a bald head, and a huge pair of silver spectacles on his nose. There was altogether something so kind, so unassuming, and so philanthropic in the appearance of this individual,

that I was immediately inspired with confidence. I began my narrative, and related the main incidents, without interruption from my hearer, who listened to me with the greatest attention and apparent interest.—'My good young man,' said the merchant, taking off his spectacles, and wiping them, 'I feel deeply for you. Every word which you have told me, I firmly believe; your manner and your language inspire me with confidence. Merciful God! into what a state would society be plunged if innocence that had been wronged, could not obtain the credence of those to whom it offered its justification! I repeat, I am interested in you; I feel deeply for you. You have had your share of misfortune, poor young man! Most sincerely do I hope that your future prospects will not be equally embittered. I have a son of just your age;—he has gone to the East Indies in a free-trader in which I have a share; and, if it were only for his sake, I should feel interested in you, for you resemble him in person. Heavens! what a world this is! Why, man is a cannibal in a moral sense, for he is constantly devouring his fellow-man! Upon my word, I could weep, I could shed tears, when I think of the misfortunes which you have endured.'—'I am overcome by your kind sympathy,' said I, now certain that this time I had encountered the man who would not allow my misfortunes to stand in the way of my appointment to the vacant situation. 'How much did you receive per week at your last place?' asked the old gentleman.—'I named the sum.'—'And what hours did you keep?'—This question I also answered.—'Was your master kind and considerate?' proceeded the venerable merchant, in a compassionate tone of voice.—'He was very kind in his manners; but at parting he behaved harshly and ungenerously, when he discovered all I have just told you; and I think I had reason to complain.'—'Ah! it was cruel, it was ungenerous,' said the venerable old gentleman, musing. 'But don't you see,' he added, 'that as society is at present constituted, and I admit that its constitution is vitiated in the extreme, it is impossible for a man who depends upon the world for his subsistence, to act contrary to the received notions and usual habits of that world. Now, for my part, I should be glad, I should be delighted to take you in a moment; but I dare not. I am very sorry, but I really *would* strain a point to serve you, if I possibly could.'—'You may suppose that I was astonished at this announcement. I had made sure of the situation from the first moment that the old merchant had addressed me; and I now saw my hopes cruelly and fatally defeated. With a heavy heart I went away; and the tears ran down my cheeks, as I reflected upon all I had just heard. Never did my situation in the world appear more lonely—never more truly desperate!

"My position was too hopeless to allow me to apply at another mercantile establishment for upwards of an hour. It required that interval to soothe and soften down my feelings; and I then ventured into the warehouse of an export merchant upon a very extensive scale, whose name was down upon my list. I was introduced into the presence of a young man, who wore a large blue figured satin stock with an enormous gold pin, and a chain hanging over an elegant silk waistcoat. This gentleman sat on one side of a desk; and his partner, who was dressed as well as he was, occupied the other. I immediately attracted their attention; and the elder partner, laying down his pen, exclaimed, 'Why, you're a devilish smart looking fellow. Here, sit down and take a glass of

porter; you seem tired. By the bye, we haven't had our cigars yet, Dick,' he added, addressing his partner; 'let's smoke and talk over this business at the same time. Sit down, my man: we have no humbug about us, I can tell you'—And so indeed it appeared; for the two gentlemen produced cigars and bottled porter, and I was very soon engaged in a most comfortable chat with them. At length they began to speak about the business which had taken me there, and when I told them my story in a straightforward manner, they declared, with an oath, that 'they would take me on my word, and that they didn't want any damned reference, or any thing of that kind.' The terms were agreed upon, and I was to commence my duties on the following morning. When I took my leave the two partners shook hands with me, expressing their conviction that 'I was a damned good fellow and understood what was what,' and also that 'I was just the kind of bird they had some time been looking for.' I accordingly entered on this new place; but I had not been there long, before I began to notice, though I was regularly paid, that a great many persons called for money, and never could obtain a settlement of their accounts. On some occasions the partners were denied, although they were in the counting-house, drinking and smoking; and then the applicants were very much disposed to be insolent, making use of such terms as 'swindlers,' 'rogues,' &c. Some would express their conviction 'that it was all a regular *do*,' while others felt equally certain 'that it was nothing but a *plant*.' There was also another circumstance which astonished me; and that was the singular mode in which the business of the firm was conducted. No sooner did the bales of goods arrive by the front door, than they were carried out at the back, and sent away in vans. Altogether it was a most extraordinary firm; and one morning I discovered that the doors were closed, the partners had bolted, and the City-officer was inquiring after them, in consequence of a warrant which he had with him for their apprehension. Thus I lost a place where the duties were easy, but where the respectability attached to it was not very likely to increase my own.

"I was thus thrown once more upon the world; and again was I compelled to look out for a situation. I applied at numerous warehouses and offices; but when I stated my real condition,—when I revealed the secret that I was related to a man who had been hanged,—I was thrust from the doors of some, reproached for my impertinence in calling by others, and treated with coolness or contempt by a third set of men. No one seemed to believe that I could possibly be honest. Day after day saw the renewal of disappointment, and that sickening at the heart which leads to despair;—night after night did I return to my lodging, to meet a landlady who wanted the money I owed her. At last she would have no further patience; and one night when I went back late, she poked her head out of a window, desiring me to begone and loading me with abuse. I slunk away, almost heart-broken at the treatment I had just received, and at the deplorable situation to which I was reduced. Accident, or rather necessity, conducted me back to the low lodging-house at which I had put up on my first arrival in London; and there I fell in with some persons who were very willing to assist me in a certain way. In fact they proposed that I should join them in a robbery which they were arranging; and after vainly struggling with my better feelings, I consented. It is no use to tell you how I got on from bad to

worse:—you can both very well guess how it is that when once a man gets regularly into this line, he seldom or ever gets out of it again till his career is cut short by transportation or the scaffold."

Thus terminated *Tom the Snammer's History*, which, as we stated at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, we have greatly modified in style and changed in language, without however omitting, altering, or exaggerating any one incident, nor any one sentiment.

It was now late; and the Snammer took his leave of Josh Pedler and Matilda Briggs, having promised to call again next day, and arrange with the former the contemplated robbery of Old Death.

CHAPTER LXXX.

M^R. AND M^S. CURTIS.

It was about two o'clock on the following afternoon that a travelling-carriage with four posters thundered along Baker Street, to the great admiration of that semi-fashionable neighbourhood, and at length stopped at a house the door of which was immediately opened by a footman wearing a livery of such varied colours that the rainbow was nothing to it.

Divers countenances appeared at the windows of the neighbouring dwellings; for it would seem that the travelling-carriage—or rather the persons whom it contained, were an object of curiosity and interest to the elderly ladies in turbans in the drawing-rooms and the servant-maids in the garrets, the latter of whom completely flattened their noses against the panes in their anxiety to obtain a view of the fashionably dressed gentlemen who handed the magnificently attired lady from the vehicle, while the footman in the transcendent livery assisted the lady's-maid to alight from the high seat behind.

And since all the neighbourhood of Baker Street appears to know right well who the arrivals are, we shall not affect any mystery with our readers; but plainly, distinctly, and at once declare that the fashionably dressed gentleman was Mr. Frank Curtis, and the magnificently attired lady was Mrs. Curtis, late Mrs. Goldberry.

This excellent couple had just returned home, after passing their honeymoon in the country, as all rich and fashionable people are bound to do; and five little Goldberrys were crowding at the front door to welcome their mamma and their "new papa." These specimens of the Goldberry race formed, in respect to their ages, an ascending scale commencing with Number 5 and terminating with Number 13, and exhibiting as much pleasing variety as could possibly exist in the pug-nose species and the chubby-face genus.

These delightful children set up a perfect yell or joy, which was heard at least ten houses off, when their "new papa" assisted their old mamma to alight from the carriage; for Mrs. Goldberry could not be said to be *young*, she being on the shady side of forty, though blessed with such a juvenile family.

"Happy is the *man*," says the psalmist, meaning also *woman*, "who hath his quiver full of them." but Mrs. Goldberry fancied that it rather spoilt the effect of a bride's return, to behold a hall full of them. Nevertheless, she gave them each a maternal hug; and the youngest set up a shout because she did not give him a box of toys into the bargain.

Let us suppose half an hour to have elapsed since

the return of the "happy pair." At the expiration of that period we shall find them seated in the drawing-room, enjoying a pleasant *tête-à-tête* chat until the early dinner which had been ordered should be duly announced by the rainbow-excelling footman.

Mrs. Goldberry was, as above stated, a trifle past forty; although she never acknowledged to more than thirty-one. She was somewhat stout, had coarse masculine features, a tolerably good set of teeth, certainly fine eyes, and was as yet independent of the adventitious aids of the wig-maker and rouge manufacturer. Little of her history was known by Mr. Curtis until the period (a few weeks previously to the marriage) when he became acquainted with her through the simple process of picking up her youngest boy who happened to fall into some mud one day when the lady and her children were taking a walk in the vicinity of Baker Street. This little act of politeness on the part of Frank had naturally led to the exchange of a few observations; the exchange of a few observations brought Mrs. Goldberry to her own door; her own door admitted her into the house, whither Frank was politely invited to follow her, the following her in was followed by the saving up of luncheon; the luncheon led to increased communicativeness; and the communicativeness made Frank aware that his new acquaintance was the widow of the late Mr. Goldberry, gentleman, and the undisputed possessor of a clear income of five thousand a year. Glorious news this for Frank, who suffered the lady to understand that he enjoyed a similar income; and then they laughed a great deal at the funny coincidence. When Frank took his leave, he requested permission to call again; and this favour could not be refused to a gentleman who had picked the child out of the mud and who had five thousand a year. Thus frequent visits led to tender proposals; the tender proposals ended in marriage; and the marriage ended in—

But we were going on much too fast; and therefore we must pause at the point indicated ere we commenced this brief digression—namely, at the *tête-à-tête* discourse while awaiting the announcement of dinner.

"Well, my love," said Frank, "here we are once more in London. Upon my word, there's nothing like London after all—as my friend the Earl of Blackwall says."

"And yet I think we were very comfortable in the country, Frank?" observed Mrs. Curtis, late Mrs. Goldberry, with a simper as fascinating as she could possibly render a grimace formed by a large mouth.

"Oh! but you and I can be happy any where, dear," said Frank. "We mustn't remain in Baker Street, though: I shall take a slap-up house in Grosvenor Square, if I can get one there: at all events, somewhere more in the fashionable quarter. Now, I'll tell you what I've been thinking of—and I'm sure that you'll approve of my plan. You see, there's all those dear children of your's—I'm sure I love them as well as if I was their real father, the darlings—"

"You're quite a duck, Frank," exclaimed Mrs. Curtis, tapping him slightly on the face.

Well—I don't think I'm a bad fellow at all," continued the young gentleman, smoothing down his hair very complacently; "And the plan I'm going to propose to you will prove it. Indeed, it's just what my very particular friend the Marquis of Woolwich did, when he married under similar circumstances—I mean a lady with a young family."

"And what did his lordship do?" inquired Mrs. Curtis.

"He made this arrangement with his wife," explained Frank:—"All his own property was to be left in the funds to accumulate for the benefit of the children—never to be touched—to be locked up like a rat in a trap, as one may say; and the lady's property was to serve for the household and all other expenses. Now, this is just what I propose we shall do. My hundred and forty thousand pounds shall be so locked up; and your income, my love, will do for us to live upon. In fact, I'll make a will to-morrow, settling all my fortune on you in case you survive me, or on the children at your death."

It is astonishing how blank Mrs. Curtis's countenance became as her beloved husband proposed this arrangement: but she managed to hide her confusion from him by means of her handkerchief, while he flattered himself that his generous consideration of her children had drawn tears from her eyes.

"This little arrangement will decidedly be the best," continued Frank; "and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that your dear children are well provided for. In fact, it was but the day before the happy one which united us, that I met my friend the Duke of Gravesend, and he was advising me how to act in the matter saying what he had done, as I told you just now. And his Grace's authority is no mean one, I can assure you, my dear. But you don't answer me. what are you thinking about?"

Mrs. Curtis was thinking of a great deal;—a horrible idea had struck her. Was it possible that Frank's vaunted property was all moonshine, and that he was now inventing a means of concealing this fact from her? She had been vain enough to suppose all along that he was enamoured of her person far more than of her alleged five thousand a year; and he had given her so many assurances of the disinterestedness of his affection, that she had congratulated herself on hooking him most completely. She knew that he was the nephew of the rich Sir Christopher Blunt, and had readily believed, therefore, that he himself was rich also; and, experienced though she were in the ways of the world, she had not instituted any inquiries to ascertain the truth of his assertions relative to his property. In a word, she fancied she had caught a green, foolish, but wealthy young fellow; whereas she was now seized with the frightful apprehension that she had laboured under a complete delusion. And this alarm was the more terrible, as the reader may conceive when we inform him that she herself was a mere adventuress—without a farthing of annual income derivable from any certain source—and overwhelmed with debts, her creditors having only been kept quiet for the last few weeks by her representations that she was about to marry a young gentleman of fortune. In a word, she had only taken the house in Baker Street on the hopeful speculation of catching some amorous old gentleman of property: and she had deemed herself particularly fortunate when she received the proposals of an amorous *young* gentleman who, in the course of conversation, happened to intimate that he possessed five thousand a year.

Mrs. Curtis's confusion and terror,—nay, absolute horror, may therefore be well conceived when the dreadful suspicion that she herself was as much taken in as her husband, flashed to her mind.

"You don't answer," repeated Frank: "what the deuce are you thinking of?"

"I was thinking, my love," replied the lady, subduing her feelings as well as she could, and still clinging to the faint hope that all might not be so



bad as she apprehended,—“I was thinking, my love, that your arrangement is not feasible, for this simple reason—that my fortune is so locked up and settled on my children, I can only touch the dividends; and I shall have nothing to receive till July. Moreover, I run very short at my banker's now—indeed, I believe I have overdrawn them—and so, all things considered, it will be impossible, and unnecessary even if possible, to carry your generous proposal into effect.”

“I didn't know your money was so locked up!” exclaimed Frank, looking mightily stupid, in spite of his strenuous endeavours to appear perfectly happy and contented. “I thought your fortune was at your own disposal?”

“Certainly—the interest,” responded Mrs. Curtis, now finding by her husband's manner that her worst fears were considerably strengthened.

“The devil!” murmured Frank petulantly.

“What did you say, dearest?” asked the lady.

“Oh! nothing, love—only that it does 'nt signify at all, so long as we have the interest of the money settled on your children—and that's five thousand a year.”

“Which, with your five thousand a year, makes us ten, love,” added the lady, eyeing him askance.

“To be sure!” said Frank: and, walking to the window, he hummed a tune to conceal his desperate vexation.

This worthy pair had, however, each a consolation left—one real, the other imaginary.

The real consolation was on the side of the lady, who had saved herself from the danger of a debtor's prison by marrying Mr. Curtis. The imaginary consolation was the idea which this gentleman nourished that his amiable spouse enjoyed at all events the annual income of five thousand pounds. Moreover, as he glanced round the elegantly furnished drawing-room, and in imagination at all the other apartments in the dwelling, he thought to himself, “Well, hang it! with five thousand a year and this splendid house, I think I can manage to make myself pretty comfortable. Of course every thing's paid for—and that's a blessing!”

Scarcely had Mr. Curtis disposed of this solacing reflection, when the livery servant entered to announce that “dinner was served up.”

Frank offered his arm to his lady in the most jaunty manner possible,—for, as the reader may suppose, he had many reasons to induce him to be uncommonly attentive to one who (as he thought) held

the purse; and the lady, on her side, accepted in a most charming manner the homage thus paid her—because she was not as yet quite certain that her husband's property was really aerial, and even if it should prove so, he must become the scapegoat between herself and her ravenous creditors.

Indeed the little tokens of endearment which the "happy couple" thought it fit to lavish upon each other as they descended the stairs, created such huge delight on the part of the livery servant following them, that this individual, totally forgetting the dignity which should have accompanied such a gorgeous livery, actually and positively diverted himself by means of that wonderful arrangement of the hands commonly called "taking a sight."

The dinner passed off in the usual way; and when the cloth was removed and the domestic was about to retire, Frank exclaimed in an authoritative manner, "John, bring up a bottle of claret."

"Yes, sir—claret, sir?" said the servant, fidgeting about near the door, and glancing uneasily towards his mistress, who did not however happen to observe him.

"I specified claret as plain as I could speak, John," cried Mr. Curtis angrily; "and so make haste about it."

"Yes, sir,—only—" again hesitated the domestic. "Only what?" vociferated Frank.

"Only there ain't none, sir," was the answer.

"No claret, John?" cried Mrs. Curtis, now taking part in the discussion.

"No ma'am. There was but two bottles of wine left when you went away, ma'am—with master—and them's the Port and Sherry on the table now ma'am."

"John, you must be mistaken!" exclaimed Frank. "Your mistress assured me that the cellar was well stocked—"

"Yes, my dear," interrupted Mrs. Curtis: "and I was so far right in telling you what I did, because on the very morning—the happy morning, dear, you know—when we went away, I wrote to Mr. Beeswing, my wine-merchant—or rather *our* wine-merchant, I should say—to order in a good stock of Port, Sherry, Champagne, and Claret."

"And what the devil, then, does Mr. Beeswing mean by this cursed neglect?" cried Frank. "There's Log, Wood, and Juice, my friend Lord Paddington's wine-merchants, who would be delighted to serve us. Did you know of this order, John, that your mistress gave?"

"Ye-o-s, sir—I did," was the stammering reply, delivered with much diffidence and many twirlings of the white napkin.

"Well, my dear—it is no use to make ourselves uncomfortable about the business," said Mrs. Curtis, evidently anxious to quash the subject at once. "You can put up with what there is to-day; and to-morrow you can give an order to your noble friend's wine-merchants. That will do, John—you can retire."

"No—by God! that will not do!" vociferated Frank. "This fellow Beeswing has behaved most shamefully. It's a regular insult—as the Prince of Gibraltar would call it! But I dare say he forgot it: and since you knew of the order, John, why the devil did n't you see that it was executed while we were away?"

"My dear—" began Mrs. Curtis, in a tone of remonstrance.

"Answer me, you fellow!" cried Frank, turning in a threatening way towards the domestic, and unable to resist the opportunity of indulging his bullying propensities. "Why the devil did n't you attend to the order given by your mistress?"

"Well, sir—and so I did," responded the servant, now irritated by the imperious manner of his master. "I went a dozen times to Beeswing's while you and missus was away."

"Frank, dear—do leave this to me," urged the lady.

"No, my dear—this concerns me, as the master of the house," exclaimed Frank, looking very pompous and very fierce. "Well, John—and what the deuce did Beeswing say when you did see him?"

"Please, sir, he said he'd rayther not," was the astounding answer.

Mr. Frank Curtis looked aghast.

"I always knew he was the most insulting fellow in the world—that Beeswing!" cried the lady, colouring deeply and affecting violent indignation. "But we will never deal with him again, I vow and declare! John, tell him to send in his bill—at once, mind—"

"He has, ma'am," interrupted the servant. "In fact, there's a many letters waiting for master."

"Then why the devil did n't you give them to me before?" exclaimed Frank, not knowing precisely what to think of Mr. Beeswing's conduct, but in a very bad humour on account of the disappointment relative to the claret.

John, the servant, made no reply to the question last put to him, but advancing towards the table, produced from his pocket about thirty letters and other documents, all of which he laid before his master, his countenance the while wearing a most curious and very sinister expression, as much as to say, "You're a very bumptious kind of a young man; but these papers will, perhaps, bring you down a peg or two."

"You may retire," said Frank, savagely; and this intimation was forthwith obeyed. "Very curious conduct, that of Beeswing, my dear?" continued Mr. Curtis, as soon as the door had closed behind the servant.

"Very, dear—I can't make it out," responded Mrs. Curtis. "But pray do n't bother yourself with those letters and papers now. They can't be very particular; and you will have more time to-morrow dear."

"Oh! I can look over them, and we can go on talking all the same," said Frank: "because I can't think how the deuce so many letters should be addressed to me *here*—instead of at my own place;—I mean, I should n't have thought that such a lot of my friends would have already heard of our union, love," he added, with a tender glance towards the lady, who was sitting very much in the style figuratively represented in common parlance as being "on thorns."

And Mr. Curtis's visual rays, having thus benignly bent themselves on his companion, were once more fixed on the pile of letters and documents lying before him.

The lady tossed off a bumper of Port, and filled her glass again, in an evident fit of painful nervousness; while her husband opened the first letter, the contents of which ran as follows:—

"SIR,

Oxford Street.

"We beg to enclose our account for furniture supplied to Mrs. Curtis, late Mrs. Goldberry, and respectfully solicit an early settlement, as the bill has been running for a considerable time.

"Your obedient Servants,

"TUFFE and TUNKS."

"The devil!" ejaculated Frank, as he cast his eyes over the inclosure: "'Bill delivered, £876 6s 6d.' God bless my soul! that's a stinger! Why, I thought all the furniture must have been paid for, my dear?"

"Not exactly, love—you perceive," returned the lady. "One never pays an upholsterer's bill for so long a time, you know: indeed—it quite slipped my memory, it's such a trifle!"

"Well, so it is, dear," observed Frank, reassured by the calm and indifferent way in which his wife disposed of *the trifle*: and he proceeded to open another letter, which announced a second trifle in the ensuing manner:—

"SIR,

Furnival's Inn.

"We are desired by Messieurs Ore and Dross, jewellers, to apply to you for the payment of 377*l.* 10*s.* being the amount of debt contracted by your present wife, late Mrs. Goldberry, with our clients, and unless the same be paid, together with 6*s.* 8*d.* for cost of this application, within three days from the date hereof, we shall be compelled to have recourse to ulterior measures without farther notice.

"Your obedient Servants,

"DAWKINS and SKASHER"

"What a thundering lot of jewellery you must have, to be sure, dear!" exclaimed Frank, as he handed this letter to his wife. "But, 'pon my soul! I think you've been rather extravagant, love—have n't you?"

"Oh! my dear—ladies *must* have jewellery, you know," returned Mrs. Curtis; "and, after all I have paid Ore and Dross, I really am surprised at their importunity. But we will pay them, and have done with them, dear."

"So we will, love," responded Frank; "and I'll ask my friend the Duke of Hampstead to recommend *his* jeweller to us. But here's a precious letter! Why—what the deuce? There's a dozen pawnbroker's tickets in it, I declare!"

Mrs. Curtis fell back almost senseless in her chair, while her husband perused the ensuing letter:—

"I rite maddam 2 inform u that I can't sel the dewplikets wich u Placed in mi ands as seekouraty for mi Bil and has u've married a gent wich as propperti 1 ope u'll now settel my Bil wich as bin a runnin for 18 mounce and i ope u'll settel it soon leastways as soon has u cum ome becaus i ham in rale want of it being a loan widder wich as lorst mi Usban 2 yere cum mussummer an having 5 young childern an another cumming bi axident but i shant do so no more an shal be verry appy to go on washin for u wen u've pade this Bil wich is thirty fore pouns thrippence dere maddam play do this 2 oblege me the instunt u cum ome u can send it upp by mr jon yure futman or els mi Littel gal shal wate on u at anny our u no i've never prest u an i tuk the dewplikets 2 oblege u but cood n't dew nuthtink with them an now they've run out and its no falt of mine becaus i'd no munny to pay the interesk and u was gorn out of town with ure new usban wich i ear is a verry fine young man wich i'm glad to ear for ure sak dere maddam eggskews this long letter becaus the doctor should say i shal be confined this weak an its hard lines to ave no munney at such a time i arn't sent ome the last batch of linning becaus i ware obleged to mak a way with it butt i send the dewplikit of that has wel has the dewplikets of the wotch and ehane an other trinklets wich i ope u'll reseave saf an now as u'r all rite and r a ritch wumman u'll not be angree with me for puttun ure linning upp the spout att such a critikal moment dere maddam pray eggskews this ritch wich i no is verry bad butt mr pen is verry bad an

ime in grate pane wile i rite ure obejent umbal servant's kummain susan

spriggs,

mary lee bone

"Mrs. Kirtis
baker
strete

lane wigmore stretre
cavendish
squair."

"Madam, it's all a cursed plant!" vociferated Frank Curtis, starting from his seat, and throwing down the letter, during the perusal of which he had been scarcely able to control his impatience. "I see it all—it's a cursed imposition—an infernal plant—and I'm a—a—damned fool!"

Thus speaking, the young gentleman shook his better half violently by the shoulders; and she, having nothing to urge in explanation of the extraordinary letter of her washerwoman, screamed just loud enough to appeal hysterical without alarming the servants and went off into a fit, as a matter of course.

"Fooled—duped—done brown, by God!" exclaimed Curtis, as he began to pace the room with no affected agitation. "Saddled with a wife and five children—overwhelmed with her debts and my own—and, what's a deuced sight worse, made an ass of! I've regularly sold myself, as my friend the Duke—no, damn the Duke! I'm in no humour for Dukes and that kind of nonsense now—I do n't know a Duke, and never did—and never shall—and so it's no use telling a parcel of lies any more! Plague take this old cat with her half-dozen brats—or near upon that number—"

"And plague take you, then!" screeched the newly-married lady, recovering with most surprising abruptness from her fit, and starting up like a fury. "Why, you swindling scoundrel, how dare you call me names? I'll tear your eyes out, I will, if you say over again what you've just said."

"I say you're a regular adventuress!" cried Frank.

"And you are an impostor—a cheat!" yelled the lady.

"Your fortune is all a gammon!" exclaimed Curtis.

"And your's all moonshine!" retorted his wife.

"You've taken me in shameful!"

"And you've done the same to me!"

"You're——" cried Frank, nearly suffocated with rage.

"And so are you, whatever you're going to call me!" vociferated the late Mrs. Goldberry.

Curtis was unable to give forth any rejoinder; and Mrs. Curtis, resuming her seat, had recourse to the truly feminine alternative of bursting into tears.

A long pause ensued, constituting a truce to recriminations and vituperations for several minutes, and affording the pair leisure for reflection.

We will describe the ideas that gradually expanded in their minds, as such explanation will the more easily prepare the reader for the result of the quarrel.

Frank Curtis, on his side, recognized the grand truth, that what was done could not be undone—and then he came to the philosophical conviction, that it would be prudent to make the best of a bad job. He reflected on the folly of an exposure, which would be attended with immediate ruin;—bringing about his ears a host of creditors, who would only become the more clamorous when they were brought in contact with each other, and were placed in a condition to ascertain their number and

compare the amounts of their claims. He fancied that by allowing himself to be represented as a man of property his wife might silence the creditors for a time, during which the war could be carried on; and though an explosion must sooner or later take place, yet it was some consolation to the young gentleman to think that the evil day might be postponed by keen manœuvring and skilful generalship. He feared being laughed at much more than the idea of a debtor's prison; and delay was every thing to a man in his desperate circumstances. "There was no telling what might turn up;" and he thought that if he could only dazzle the eyes of his uncle Sir Christopher with fine stories relative to the brilliancy of the match which he had formed with the late Mrs. Goldberry, he might contrive to wheedle a large sum of money out of the old gentleman on some such pretext as a desire to discharge divers debts, and a disinclination to confess to his wife that he had contracted them.

On the other hand, Mrs. Curtis fell into a similar train of thought. It would, she fancied, be easy for her to visit the numerous creditors, assure them that she had as yet intercepted all the letters they had written to her husband, and implore them not to ruin her in his good opinion by exposing her liabilities to him. She even arranged in her head the very words which she would use when calling on them:—"My husband is about to sell an estate in Ireland, and the moment the purchase money is paid, I am sure to be enabled to obtain from him a sum sufficient to liquidate all my debts. Have a little forbearance, therefore, and all will be well." Thus she also recognised the utter inutilty and monstrous folly of exposing themselves by means of quarrels; and as their minds were, by these parallel systems of reasoning, prepared for reconciliation—or at least the show of it—the making up of their dispute was no very difficult matter.

Frank was the one to break the ice with the first overture.

"Well, I think we're two pretty fools," he said, approaching the chair in which she was rocking herself to and fro: "don't you?"

"To alarm all the house, and let our servants know every thing," added the lady.

"No—no: it isn't so bad as *that* yet," returned Frank. "But I vote that we have no more quarrels."

"I am sure I agree to the proposition, Frank," was the answer.

"It's carried then, without a dissentient voice," exclaimed Curtis; "as my friend the Duke——"

"Let us have no more falsehoods," interrupted his wife. "You said just now that you knew no Duke—never had known one—and never should——"

"But I thought you was in a fit at that moment, my dear?" said Frank.

"Maybe I was—but still I could hear all that passed, as you very well know. However, let us be good friends, and hold a consultation how we are to proceed."

"Good!" cried Frank. "And we will begin with a glass of wine each. There—let us drink each other's health. Here's to you, my dear. And now to business. I suppose all these letters and bills are about unpaid debts of yours?"

"Precisely so, love," answered Mrs. Curtis.

"How much do you think they amount to?"

"About eighteen hundred pounds, I should say?"

"And how much money have you got towards paying them, dear?" inquired Frank.

"Eighteen-pence, love," responded the lady, extracting that sum from her pocket.

There was a pause, during which Frank Curtis refilled the glasses; and then the "happy pair" looked inquiringly at each other, as much as to ask, "Well, what shall we do?"

"This is devilish awkward!" observed Frank. "But I'll tell you what I've been thinking of."

"I am all attention, dear," said his better half.

Mr. Curtis then conveyed in words the substance of those reflections which we have recorded above, and which had bent his mind towards a reconciliation.

"I entirely approve of all you say," remarked Mrs. Curtis; "and I will now tell you what I have been thinking of."

"Fire away, love," was her husband's encouraging observation.

The lady detailed, in her turn, the reflections which had occupied her mind a few minutes previously.

"Then we both hold the same opinions?" exclaimed Frank.

"Exactly. And if we play our cards well, there is no immediate danger of any thing," remarked the lady.

"But all the threatened writs—the probability of a sudden arrest—and the clamours of such small tradesmen or other persons as your delectable washerwoman, who is about to add to her family two years after the death of her husband?" exclaimed Frank interrogatively.

"I have trinkets, plate, and such like things which will realise a hundred pounds," said Mrs. Curtis; "and with that sum we can settle the little claimants, who are always more noisy and clamorous than the large ones."

The colloquy had just reached this highly satisfactory point, when a tremendous double knock threatened to beat in the front door, and the bell was instantaneously afterwards set ringing in frantic accompaniment.

"Some one's ill," cried Frank, "and they take this house for a Doctor's."

"At all events it is no dun," observed Mrs. Curtis.

Here the thundering knock and insane ring were repeated.

"I just tell you what, my dear," resumed the young gentleman, rising from his chair, and looking as fierce as possible: "I've a deuced great mind to go out and ask who the devil it is that dares knock and ring twice in half a minute at our door in that fashion. I'm certain it's no friend of your's—and it's none of mine. So—as sure as my name is Francis Curtis, Esquire, of Baker Street—I'll——"

But at this instant the dining-room door was thrown open by the domestic in gorgeous livery; and the countenance of the warlike Francis Curtis, Esquire, of Baker Street, grew white as a sheet, when the servant announced—"CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS!"

CHAPTER LXXIII.

CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS AGAIN.

"BE JASUS! and it is my dear friend, Mither Frank Cur-r-tis!" exclaimed the redoubtable officer, as he stalked into the room: then, perceiving the lady, he untiled his head in a most graceful manner—or, in plain terms, removed his foraging cap with a certain rounding sweep of his right arm, saying, "Your servant, Mim. I presume that I have the honour-r to pay my respects to Mrs. Curtis?"

"Ye-es—that is Mrs. Curtis, Captain," said Frank, while the lady gave a somewhat cold inclination of the head.

And a sweet and ligant wife ye've got, ye dog!" cried the Captain, bestowing a friendly poke in the ribs of the newly married gentleman. "Come, shake hands, Mither Cur-r-tis. men like you and me must n't harbour animosity against each other. Let the past be past, as the saying is: and an excellent saying it is too, ma'am," he added, in a tone of bland appeal to the lady, as he nearly wrung her husband's fingers off in the enthusiasm of his anxiety to convince him that *this time* at least he came for no hostile purpose.

"Sit down, Captain," said Frank, now feeling more at his ease than he had done since the unexpected appearance of the famous duelist. "Will you take a glass of wine? There's Port and Sherry on the table; and there's Champagne, Claret, Hock, and Burgundy in the cellar—as well as capital whiskey."

"Be the holy poker-r!" exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, "and I'll jist throuble ye for the potheen. The thrue Irish potheen, ma'am," he continued, turning once more towards Mrs. Curtis, "is the most ligant beveiage unther the sun. On my estates in ould Ireland I allow no water at all; and my pisanthry is the finest to be seen in the whole counthry."

"Indeed, Sir," observed Mrs. Curtis, beginning to grow amused with the strange character who had thus intruded himself upon the momentous discussion which she and her husband were carrying on at the time.

"Be Jasus! Mim, and it's as thrue as ye're sitting there!" exclaimed the Captain. "In my own counthry, Mim, I'm a Justice of the Peace, and I never allow my pisanthry to be interfered with by the gaungers. I let them keep as many illicit stills as they like; and the consequence is they adore me."

"I should think that to be very likely," said Frank.

But here's the whiskey—and there's hot water. Now, ohn, put the sugar on the table; that's right!"

The servant having retired, Captain O'Blunderbuss proceeded to compound his favourite beveiage by mixing equal parts of spirit and water, and adding thereto three lumps of sugar.

"I always brew the first glass sthrong, Mim," he observed, "in honour to ould Ireland. Your health, Mim."

"But I'm not Irish, sir," responded the lady, laughing.

"Then I'm sure ye ought to be, Mim," cried the Captain; "and, be Jasus! if ye was, ye'd be an honour to the counthry!"

Mrs. Curtis simpered, and bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Come, old fellow," said Frank, "you needn't mind my wife being present—she's a woman of the world, as my fiend the Archbishop of Paris used to say of his niece;—and so you may as well tell us how you managed to get out of a certain place and what made you think of honouring us with this visit."

"Och! and be Jasus, I'll answer the last question fir-rst, Mr. Cur-r-tis," responded the Captain. "Well, thin, ye must know that I've taken a great affection for ye, because, be the power-rs! I've heard spake of your bravery in a many quar-rters; and it isn't me that would cherish animosity against a gallant fellow."

The Captain might have added that, being in want of grog, supper, and lodging, he had racked his brain all day to think of some soft, easy individual amongst his acquaintance, on whom he could quarter himself for a week or so; and having at length remembered to have seen the marriage of Mr. Curtis and Mrs. Goldberry duly announced, at the time, in the fashionable news-

papers (the said announcements having been duly paid for, as a matter of course), it had struck him, that he might make himself very comfortable in Baker Street for a short period.

"Well, I feel highly flattered by your good opinion of me," said Frank. "It's quite true that I've killed a man or two in my time, and winged half a dozen others,—but really those are trifles which one scarcely thinks of any value. At the same time, Captain, we duellists, you know, are devilish chary of our reputation; and so it's just as well that the world should talk in a respectful way about us—eh?"

"Be the holy poker-r! and ye're right, my boy!" exclaimed the Captain, mixing the second glass of grog; then, turning towards Mrs. Curtis, he said, "I always make my second jorum, Mim, a little stronger than the first, for the honour of ould England; because that's always my second toast! So here's for ould England! And now," continued Captain O'Blunderbuss, after having taken a long draught of the potent liquor, "I'll answer your first question, Mither Cur-r-tis. And sure it's how I got out of limbo that ye was asking about. Well, I'll tell ye; and, be Jasus! ye'll say that such a runn stant never was seen. The cowardly bastes locked me up in Horsemonger Lane, ye know, at the suit of one Spriggins, for three hundred and forty-seven pounds, including costs. For three whole days I was jest for all the world like a rampagious lion. There's an infer-nal non grating all round the yaird where the prisoner-rs have to walk about; and, be Jasus! I chafed and foamed inside those bar-rs, till the other prisoner-rs got so frightened they sent a petition to the governor to get me locked up in the sthiong room. So the governor sends for me, and says he, '*Captain O'Blunderbuss, ye're a terror to the other people in the debtors' department of the prison, and ye'd better be after thinking of making some arrangement with your creditor, or I shall be forced to put you by yourself in the sthiong room.*'—Be Jasus!" says I, "and I'll skin any man who shall dar-r to lay even the tip of a finger on me for such a purpose."—Well," says the governor, "but if you've ever so little in the shape of ready money to offer your creditor, I'll see him myself and thry what I can do for ye."—So I pulled out my purse; and behold ye! I'd jest two pound three shillings, and sixpence, to pay three hundred and forty-seven pounds with.—*Is it three-halfpence in the pound ye'll be after offering?*" asks the governor.—*Jest that same,*" says I, "and if ever Mither Spriggins gets another furthang out of me, then I'll skin myself!"—So away goes the governor to the creditor; and heaven only knows what blarney he pitches him;—but in the course of a day or two, down comes a discharge on condition that I pay the three-halfpence in the pound.—*Now,*" says I, "that's treating an Irish gentleman as he deserves;" and so I got clean out of that infer-nal place. Here's your health, Mim."

And the Captain emptied his glass.

"You managed that business capital," exclaimed Frank Curtis, who began to think that it would be no bad speculation to maintain the martial gentleman altogether in Baker Street to frighten away the creditors,—or, at all events, to employ him to go round to them, in case they should prove inclined to act in a hostile manner towards him.

At that moment his eyes met those of his wife; and the glance of intelligence which was exchanged between them, showed that the same thought had struck them both, and at the same time.

"Help yourself, Captain," said Frank. "That whiskey was sent me as a present by the Crown Prince of Denmark, for having been second to his illustrious wife's uncle's stepmother's first cousin's nephew, in a duel three years ago."

"Blood and thunther-r!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss, "what a disthant relation! But the potheen is beautiful. I always mix my third glass sthronger than the two first, because in this same thir-rd I dhrink to the ladies—the sweet-hearts—and God bless 'em!"

Mrs. Curtis again acknowledged the compliment with a simper and an inclination of the head; and by the time the Captain had disposed of his third glass, the domestic in transcendent livery announced that coffee was served in the drawing-room.

Thither the party accordingly proceeded; Captain O'Blunderbuss escorting Mrs. Curtis, with a politeness which would have been perfectly enchanting had he not smelt so awfully of potheen.

And now, in a few minutes, behold the trio seated so cozily and comfortably at the table in the drawing-room, sipping the nectar of Mocha; while a friendly little contest took place between Frank and the Captain, to decide who could tell the greatest number of lies in the shortest space of time.

"Be Jasus!" cried O'Blunderbuss; "this coffee is an iligant beverage! But, saving your prisence, Min, it don't come up to the coffee which I grew on my own estate in ould Ireland. The thiruth was, I had such a vast extent of bog-land that I was at a loss what use to tur-rn it to—so I sent my steward off to Arabia,—yes, be the holy poker-r, direct off to Arabia,—to buy up as much coffee as he could get for money. Och! and with a power-r of coffee-berries did he come back, in the next West India-man, up the Meditherranean; and wasn't it a sowing of them same berries that we had in the bog! Ye should have seen the land eight months afterwards, with the coffee-plants grown up bigger than gooseberry bushes, and making the whole counthry smell of coffee for eight miles round. I ryalized seven huthred pounds by that spec the first year; and I have gone on with the culthure of coffee ever since."

"Oh!" said Frank, "it is astonishing what improvements might be introduced in that way, if one only had the sense to do it. When I was staying in Paris, I was very intimate with the Governor of the Bank of France, and he had a beautiful conservatory on the top of the Bank. He took me up one day to see it: 'twas in the middle of winter, and cold as the devil in the open air—but warm as a toast inside the conservatory. Well, there I saw melons as large as a bumb-shell growing in flower-pots no bigger than that slop-bason—pine-apples hanging over the sides of tea-cups—and a kind of fruit the name of which I've forgotten; but I know that it was as large as a horse's head, and of the same shape. So I said to my friend the Governor of the Mint, says I—"

Mr. Curtis stopped; for the radiant footman entered the room, saying, "Please, sir, two men wish to speak to you immediately."

"Two men!" exclaimed Frank, casting an uneasy glance towards his wife, who, it was evident, shared her husband's very natural apprehensions.

"Yes, sir—But here they are" added the footman: then turning round towards the intruders, he said, "Why didn't you wait quiet down in the hall till I'd informed master that you wanted to speak to him?"

"'Cos we doesn't do business in that ere way, old feller," responded a voice which was not altogether unknown to either Mr. Curtis or the Captain.

"Progs, the officer-r—by God!" vociferated the latter, starting from his seat.

"Yes—it's me and my master, Mr. Mac Grab, at your sarvice, gen'lemen," said Progs, pushing his way past the footman, and entering the room with his hat on his head and his stout stick in his hand.

"Please, Mr. Curtis, sir—you're wanted."

And as these words were uttered by the subordinate, the principal himself—namely, Mr. Mac Grab—made his appearance (and a very duty one it was too) in the door-way; while the footman stood aghast, and Mrs. Curtis went off into hysterics.

"Wanted!" cried Frank, casting an appealing glance towards the Captain: "who the devil wants me?"

"Whose suit is it at, sir?" asked Progs, turning towards his superior.

"Beeswing, wine-merchant—debt, two hundred pounds, owing by the lady," answered Mr. Mac Grab.

"Is it arresting my friend Misther Curtis, ye mane?" demanded Captain O'Blunderbuss, advancing towards the officers with tremendous fierceness, now that he found his own personal security unendangered.

"And why not?" growled Mac Grab, shrouding himself behind his man Progs.

"Is it why not, ye're afther asking?" shouted Captain O'Blunderbuss. "Now, be Jasus! and if ye don't both make yourselves as scarce as ye was before ye was bor-rn, it's myself that'll tayche ye a lesson of purliteness in the twinkling of a bed-post."

"Oh! that's all gammon," muttered Progs. "Mr. Curtis must either pay the money or come along with us."

"He won't do neither the one nor the t'other, ye bustes of the car-rth!" exclaimed the Captain.

"I say now—" began Mac Grab: but, before he had time to utter another word, the redoubtable Captain wrenched the short stick from the hands of Mr. Progs, and throwing it to a distance, boldly attacked the officers with his long sinewy arms in such an effectual manner, that they disappeared from the drawing-room in as short a space of time as their assailant had represented by that beautiful figure of rhetoric—"the twinkling of a bed-post."

Mrs. Curtis had deemed it most prudent to go off into a fit—Frank was nailed to the floor by the terror of being captured and dragged off to a debtor's prison—the footman considered it wise to remain a mere spectator of the fight;—and thus the Captain was unassisted in his gallant onslaught upon the sheriffs' officer and his man.

The Captain, however, had an advantage on his side: namely, that when he had once succeeded in driving the enemy back as far as the stair-case, it was comparatively an easy matter to fling them headlong down—a feat which he performed without the least ceremony or hesitation, to the infinite alarm of the female-servants in the kitchen, who came rushing up into the hall from that lower-region, screaming as heartily as they could under the conviction that the house was tumbling about their ears.

"Hold your pace! my dears," exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, rushing down the stairs after the vanquished enemy,—his countenance purple with whiskey and excitement—every vein in his forehead

swollen almost to bursting—and his fists clenched for a renewal of the onslaught.

"We'll make you smart for this, my man!" growled Mac Grab, as he rose painfully from the hall-floor.

"I'm jiggered if we don't too!" added Proggs, picking himself up as it were from the last step, and feeling his legs and arms to see if any of his bones were broken.

"Out of the house, ugly bastards that ye are!" thundered the Captain.

The officers had received sufficient evidence of the redoubtable gentleman's warlike propensities, to induce them to beat a rapid retreat,—and the moment they had evaporated by the front-door, the Captain banged it violently after them, securing it with bolts and chain.

"That's the way we serve out the riptiles in old Ireland, my dears," he exclaimed, turning towards the female servants, who, having at length comprehended the nature of the amusement going on, had ceased to scream and were enjoying the animated scene as much as if it had been a play.

Frank Curtis had heard the front door close violently; and the drawing of the bolts afterwards convinced him that the house was cleared of its invaders. He accordingly descended the stairs, laughing heartily now that the immediate peril had been averted by the prowess of the Captain. The resplendent footman was following close behind his master—very anxious to solicit his wages and his discharge there and then, and only prevented from acting thus abruptly by the formidable presence of Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Now, my friends," exclaimed this gallant gentleman, who was quite in his element under existing circumstances, "the house is in a complete state of siege! Ye must look to me as the commander of the garrison. So let the area and the ground-floor windows be all properly fastened: take care of the backdoor, wherever it leads to—and, be Jasus! we'll keep the rascals out! I know 'em well! They'll be trying all manner of dodges to get in: but they'll find themselves as mistaken as the old lady was when she scratched the bed-post and thought she was scratching her head."

Then, with wonderful alacrity, Captain O'Blunderbuss hastened to superintend the arrangements and the precautions which he had briefly suggested. He examined the windows in the drawing room—he descended to the kitchen—went out into the area—poked his nose into the coal-cellar—inspected the yard at the back—issued his orders—saw that they were executed—and then drank off half a tumbler of whiskey neat, both as a slight refreshment after the exertions of the evening, and as a token of his satisfaction at the various measures which he had adopted with a view to convert the house into an impregnable fortress.

By this time Mrs. Curtis had made up her mind to recover from her fit; but she was so dreadfully shocked at the exposure which had taken place before the servants, that she retired to her bed-chamber forthwith.

The Captain and Frank then sat down to hold, as the former gentleman expressed it, "a council of war-r-r;" and as one bottle of whiskey had been emptied, and there was not another in the house, the martial gentleman was kind and condescending enough to put up with gin, of which exhilarating fluid

he found, to his great satisfaction, there was a large supply in the cellar.

"What the devil would you have me do in this cursed embarrassment?" asked Frank.

"Be Jasus! and I'll jest tell ye now," answered the Captain. "Let me see?—this is Thursday. Well, we must maintain the siege until Sunday, and then you must give the traps leg bail into another country. Whose furniture is it in the house?"

"Why—it's ours, and it isn't," responded Frank.

"Och! and be asy now—I understand ye, my boy!" cried the Captain. "It isn't paid for, ye mane—but possession is nine points of the law; and, do the holy poker-r! we'll make it the whole twilve. Jest allow me to carry ye through this little affair. Next Sunday night, me lad, ye must be off into Surrey with the lady and little ones; and lave me to manage here. On Monday, at the top of the mornin', I'll have in a broker and sell off every stick; and I'll bring ye over the proceeds like a man of honour-r as I am."

"So far, so good," said Frank. "But how are we to get things to eat between this and Sunday, if no one is to stir out of the place?"

"Is it aying ye mane, when there's three gallons of gin in the house?" demanded Captain O'Blunderbuss, with something like indignation in his tone and manner.

"Well, but the wife and the children can't live upon gin, Captain," observed Frank; "even though the servants should have no objection."

"Not live upon gin, me boy!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss, in a state of astonishment as complete and unfeigned as if some one had just shown him his own name in the Army List, or presented him with the title-deeds of his often vaunted Irish estates: "not live upon gin, Misther Curtis!" he repeated, surveying Frank as if this young gentleman were actually taking leave of his senses. "Show me the discontented mortal, my frind, that says he won't live upon gin, and I'll jest—"

"Just what?" asked Frank, somewhat dismayed at this irascibility on the part of his companion.

"I'll skin him—by the holy poker-r!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss, rapping his clenched fist violently upon the table.

There was a long pause, during which the two gentlemen emptied and refilled their glasses.

"Be the way, me boy," suddenly exclaimed the Captain, as if an idea had just struck him, "is that old uncle of yours in town at present?"

"Yes—he came back some days ago, I understand," replied Frank.

"D'ye think he'd bleed?" asked the Captain: "for 'tis supplies to carry on the war-r in an iligant style for a long time to come, that we want; since now that we're once on a frindly footing together, Curtis, I'm not the boy to desert ye in your troubles."

He might have added that he would stick to Mr. and Mrs. Curtis so long as they had a bottle of spirits to give, or a shilling to lend him.

"I really think that it's very likely you might be able to draw the old bird," said Frank: "and to tell you the truth, I had already entertained the idea. Besides, he won't dare refuse you, Captain."

"Be Jasus! I should take it as an insult if he did," exclaimed the man of war, caressing his moustache. "But let us strike the ir-r-ron while it is hot. Dthraw up a letter to Sir-r Christopher-r in your best style; and I'll be off with it at once."

"Trust me for getting out of the garrison safe and coming back again in the same way; but mind and keep a sharp watch while I'm gone."

Frank promised compliance with this injunction, and hastened to pen a letter to his uncle, the Captain kindly undertaking to dictate the sense in which it was to be written.

The precious document ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR UNCLE,

"I hope this will find you blooming, as it leaves me; and as you and me have both made ourselves happy by marriage, don't let us have any more animosity between us. In fact, I will show you at once that I mean to forget the past, and treat you as an uncle ought to be treated by his dutiful nephew.

"Well, then, to come to the point. My friend, Captain O'Blunderbuss, whom you have the pleasure of knowing, and who improves vastly on acquaintance, has kindly lent me five hundred pounds, just to settle a few pressing debts which I had contracted during the time that I was so unfortunate as to be on bad terms with you; and as the Captain wants his money again, and I don't like to tell my wife so soon after marriage that I owe this sum, you will greatly oblige me by giving the Captain a cheque for the amount—or else Bank notes at once—he is n't very particular which, I dare say,—and I will repay you the moment I get my quarter's allowance, as the beloved and angelic creature, whom I shall have so much pleasure in introducing to you and to my dear aunt Charlotte, has promised me seven hundred pounds every three months to spend as I like and no questions asked.

"So no more at present, my dear uncle, from your dutiful, attached, obliged, and grateful nephew,

"FRANCIS CURTIS"

"What do you think of *that*?" demanded Frank triumphantly, when he had read the letter aloud for the opinion of his friend.

"Is it what I think?" exclaimed the Captain. "Be the power-rs! and it's as well as I could have done it myself, if I'd studied it for a week."

"Thanks to your suggestions," added Frank. "And now I'll just seal and direct it, while you finish your glass."

Captain O'Blunderbuss *did* drain the contents of his tumbler, as Frank foresaw that he would do, for it was one of that gallant gentleman's maxims never to waste good liquor;—and, being thus fortified with upwards of a pint of whiskey and ditto of gin—the effects of which were evident only in the fiery hue of his complexion, but by no means in his gait nor speech—he prepared to set out on his expedition to the dwelling of Sir Christopher Blunt.

"Frank," said he, putting on his foraging cap and conveying the letter to his pocket, "take the poker."

"The poker!" repeated the young man, with mingled surprise and dismay.

"And what else would ye take to dash out the brains of any man who should try to spring in at the door while I go out!" exclaimed O'Blunderbuss. "That's right, me boy," he added, as Curtis shouldered the fire-implement. "Not that it's likely for any of them bastes of the ear-rth to be lur-king about so soon affther the little affair of jest now: but it's as well to be on our guard."

Accordingly, Frank Curtis stood behind the front door, poker in hand, as the redoubtable officer issued forth; but the coast was clear so far as the retainers of the Sheriff were concerned; and the peace of the garrison remained unmolested.

Frank closed, chained, and bolted the door again; and Captain O'Blunderbuss wended his way with

an awful swagger down the street, frightening by his fierce looks all the small children whom he happened to encounter.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

* THREE MONTHS AFTER MARRIAGE.

SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT was pacing his drawing-room in a very agitated manner; and the expression of his countenance was so ludicrous, in its reflection of the thoughts that were stirring within his breast, that it was impossible to say whether he was influenced by commingled hope and suspense on the one hand, or by fear and shame on the other.

It was pretty evident that he had not been out all day; for he was unshaven—and he wore the light blue dressing-gown, the bright red trousers, and the scarlet silk cap, which his dear wife had devised as a most becoming morning costume, but which gave him the appearance of a Mussulman quack-doctor, as the golden lustre of the handsome lamp brought forth all the flaunting effects of the garb.

Advancing towards the time-piece, Sir Christopher compared his watch with that dial.

"A quarter to nine!" he murmured to himself, as he restored the huge gold repeater to his fob; "and the doctor has been an hour with her already. Well—I never heard of such a thing before—three months after marriage—it's impossible—quite impossible! Dr. Wagtail is a very clever man, no doubt!—but he's wrong for once in his life. If it was six or seven months, now—one might suppose that a premature birth—but three months—"

And the worthy knight paced the apartment in a manner which showed that "he did not know what the deuce to make of it."

"Well," he continued, again speaking in a murmuring tone, after a short pause, "it may be so, after all. For really science does discover such wonderful things now-a-days, and the world seems to undergo so many strange changes, that upon my word I should not be at all surprised if, on going out some morning, I was to see the people walking on their heads along Jermyn Street. Ah! things weren't like this when I was a boy! But then I must recollect that I live in the fashionable quarter of the town *now*, and ladies at the West End ain't like those vulgar citizens' wives. Thank God that I didn't get in for Portsoken! It was quite enough to have filled the high and responsible office of Sheriff, and to have received the distinguished honour of knighthood—But, three months!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, interrupting himself, and flying back with ludicrous abruptness to the idea that was uppermost in his mind; "three months! And, after all, who knows but that it's the fashion at the West End; and I'm sure that if it is, I shall be very glad that it has happened so. And yet the most extraordinary part of the business is that—when I suspected something of the kind, and just hinted at it to Lady Blunt—she—she scratched my face to pieces for me. Very extraordinary, indeed!"

Sir Christopher now became lost in a maze of conjecture, vague suspicion, and bewilderment, through which he certainly could not find his way; and heaven only knows how long he might have remained in the labyrinth, had not Dr. Wagtail appeared to his rescue.

"Well, doctor?" exclaimed the knight, hastening to meet the physician.

"My dear Sir Christopher, I congratulate you!" said Dr. Wagtail, considering it decent and becoming



to assume a joyous and smirking expression of countenance for the occasion, while he wrung the knight's hand with most affectionate warmth: "for it is my duty," he continued, now suddenly adopting the pompous and important style of the fashionable physician to a rich family,—“for it is my duty, Sir Christopher, to announce to you that you are the happy father of a charming boy, with whom her ladyship has been kind enough to present you”

“A boy—eh, doctor?” faltered the knight. “But of course it isn't—I mean—it can't be—a—a—full grown child?”

“Well, my dear Sir Christopher,” responded Dr. Wagtail, who perfectly understood where the shoe pinched, “from what Mr. Snipekin, the talented and much-sought-after accoucheur whom I deemed it prudent to call in just now,—from what Mr. Snipekin says, Sir Christopher, I do believe that the dear little creature has come a leetle before his time. But pray don't make yourself uneasy on that account, my dear Sir Christopher; for the sweet babe is in no danger, and is an uncommonly fine child, to be sure!”

“Then it is a little before its time, doctor—eh!” said Sir Christopher. “But—doctor—you and me are old friends, and you can speak candidly, you

know—and—the truth is—you must remember that—that—our marriage only took place—three months ago—and it seems to me rather unusual—not that I suspect dear Lady Blunt's virtue for a moment—on the contrary—I know her to be a perfect paragon of morality—at the same time—three months, doctor—and a fine boy—”

“My dear Sir Christopher,” responded Dr. Wagtail, foreseeing that the amount of his fee would depend vastly upon the state of mind in which the Knight might be when he should give it, and acting moreover upon his favourite principle of humouring the whims and wishes of all persons with whom he had any professional connexion,—“my dear Sir Christopher,” he said, looking very solemn indeed, “your avocations in the world have not allowed you time to dive into the mysteries of science and investigate the arcana of learning—much less to pursue with sesquipedalian regularity the routine of that course of study which, in the abstract, and also considered in a purely professional point of view—and having due regard to the wonders of physiological science,—in fact—ahem!—you understand me, Sir Christopher?”

“Ye-es, doctor,” drawled forth the bewildered

knight. "But I think you were going to satisfy me—you know—about the three months—and a fine boy—doctor—"

"I was coming to that point, my dear Sir Christopher," said Dr. Wagtail. "In fact, I was about to observe that *physiology*, properly considered in its etymological signification, comprehends the entire science of Nature; but I must impress upon your mind, Sir Christopher, that the ratiocinative propensities of modern physicians have induced them, doubtless after much profound cogitation, to restrict the term to that department of physical knowledge relating, referring, and belonging exclusively to organic existence. And thus, Sir Christopher—ahum!—you follow me?"

"Oh! quite easy—indeed!" returned the knight, wondering in his own mind whether it were dog Latin that stunned his ears, and also how any one individual could possibly pick up and retain such an immense amount of knowledge. "But—the point was, doctor—"

"Precisely, my dear Sir Christopher!" exclaimed the physician, looking as wise as all the seven sages of Greece put together: "it was to that very point which I was coming,—but I thought that a detailed and full explanation would prove most satisfactory to you."

"Oh! decidedly, doctor:—and I am sure I am very much obliged to you for taking the trouble to—to—"

"Well, then, my dear Sir Christopher," interrupted the fashionable physician; "all my premises being granted, and the arguments which I have adduced being fully admitted, I think that the demonstration is easy enough. Consequently, Sir Christopher, it is quite apparent that a child *may* be born three months after marriage; at the same time, I think I can assure you, that in future your excellent and amiable lady will not be quite so premature in her accouchements."

"It is not unusual, then, doctor, amongst your female patients?" said Sir Christopher, who was not entirely satisfied yet.

"It is by no means unusual that a *first* child should be born a few months after marriage, my dear Sir Christopher," answered the physician.

"And perhaps—perhaps, it's rather fashionable than otherwise?" asked the knight, in a hesitating manner.

"Well—I don't know but what it is, Sir Christopher," replied Dr. Wagtail, taking a pinch of snuff. "And now that your mind is completely set at rest on this point—as indeed it must and ought to be, after the full and professional explanation which I have given you,—I will return to the chamber of your amiable and excellent lady, and see whether you can be permitted to visit her for a few moments."

"Do, my dear doctor. And, doctor," cried the knight, as a sudden idea struck him; "pray don't—I mean, it is not necessary to let Lady Blunt know that—that—in a word—that I asked you any questions—"

"Oh! certainly not, my dear Sir Christopher," exclaimed the physician; and he then quitted the room.

"Well," thought the knight to himself, as soon as he was again alone; "and so I am the father—the happy father,"—and he made a slight grimace,—*"of a fine boy. A fine boy—oh! 'Pon my honour, I'm very glad—very glad, indeed! A son and heir—"*

a little Christopher! How very kind of my dear wife: it is a tie which will bind us together—perhaps soften her temper a little—and make her more sparing in the use of her finger nails. Well—if it's only for that, the coming of this child will be a great blessing—a very great blessing. But I really do wish the dear babe had made its appearance about six months later. Not that it matters much—seeing that I must be its father, and that the thing is rather fashionable than otherwise. Besides—Doctor Wagtail is such a clever man—such a very clever man—and his explanation was so completely satisfactory—so very lucid and clear—a fool might understand it. Well, I really ought to be a very happy fellow!"

But all the knight's attempts at self-persuasion and self-consolation were futile: there was a weight upon his spirits that he could not throw off—and in the depths of his secret soul there was an awful misgiving, to the existence of which he vainly endeavoured to blind his mental vision. He strove to be gay—he tried to establish the conviction that he was perfectly happy and contented—he did all he could to make himself admit to himself that the doctor's reasoning was conclusive:—still he could not shut out from his heart the ever recurring thought that the physician's argument might be very conclusive indeed, but that he was totally unable to understand a word of it.

Then came the fear of ridicule;—and this was the most galling sentiment of all. But, on the other hand, there was an apprehension which was not without its weight: namely, the anger of his wife, in case she should discover that he had dared to doubt her virtue.

Thus, by the time the doctor came back, the silly old gentleman had determined to take matters just as he found them: and, though half suspecting that there was something wrong in the business, he resolved to maintain as contented an air as possible, as the only means of combatting ridicule should he experience it, or of quieting his wife should she hear of any thing to excite her irritability.

"We are getting on so well, my dear Sir Christopher," said the physician, "that we can see you for a few minutes; but we cannot bear any loud speaking as yet, and we establish it as a condition that you do not attempt to kiss our child more than once, for fear you should set it crying and make our head ache."

Sir Christopher attempted a pleasant smile, and followed Dr. Wagtail to the chamber of the indisposed lady.

The moment the door was opened, the shrill but nevertheless apparently half-stifled cry of a newborn child saluted the knight's ears; and, hastening up to the bed, he bent over and kissed his wife.

"See what heaven has sent us, Sir Christopher!" said the lady, in a low and weak voice, well suited to the solemnity of her observation; and, slightly uncovering the bed-clothes, she exhibited a tiny object, looking amazingly red, but which she assured him was "the sweetest little face in the world."

"That it is—the pretty creature!" observed a hoarse voice, which appeared to emanate from the chimney, but which in reality came from no further off than the fire-place, and belonged to an elderly woman of tremendous corpulency, who was arranging some baby-linen on a clothes-horse. "I've nussed a many ladies," continued the stout pro-

priestess of the hoarse voice, "but never such a patient dear as your'n, Sir Christopher: and I never see such a angel at its birth as that babby. Why," continued the woman, advancing towards the knight and giving him a good long stare, while, potent odours of gin assailed his nostrils all the while, "I do declare that the babby is as like his father as he can be."

Sir Christopher "grinned horribly a ghastly smile," and slipped half-a-guinea into the nurse's hand, at which proof of his generosity she dropped him a curtsey that shook the house so profoundly as nearly to drop her through the floor.

"Yes—the babby's as like you, Sir, as two peas is like each other," continued the nurse, while Dr. Wagtail and the accoucheur exchanged rapid but intelligent glances at the excellence of the idea, and Sir Christopher grunted like a learned pig which has just put its snout upon the right card in a show. "I'm sure, Sir, you ought to be very much obliged to missus for presenting you with such a cherub. Poor dear! she had a sad time of it—but she bore it like a saint, as she is. Won't you let master have just one kiss at the little dear, my lady?"

The saint was just at that moment wondering whether the child, as it grew up, would bear any resemblance to a certain tall footman in a certain family at the West End: but why such an idea should enter her head, we must leave to the readers to divine.

The nurse repeated her question, adding, "Do let the little dear's pa just kiss it once; and then we must turn him out, you know, ma'am, for the present."

"Yes, Sir Christopher—you may kiss the little cherub, if you like," said Lady Blunt, in a tone which was meant to impress on her husband's mind a full sense of the favour conferred upon him: "but pray don't make the sweet child squeal out—for you're so rough."

The knight accordingly touched the babe with his lips, which he smacked to make believe that the kiss was a hearty one in spite of his wife's injunction; and, this ceremony being completed, he was turned out of the room by the nurse, whose power on such occasions amounts, as all fathers know, to an absolute despotism.

"The nurse" is a species exhibiting but little variety. Stout and in good spirits she must always be; and bottled stout and ardent spirits she highly esteems. She moreover has an excellent appetite, and is fond of many meals in the course of the day. She awakes at five or six in the morning, and makes herself strong hot coffee and a couple of rounds of toast, putting a great deal of sugar to the former, and a vast quantity of butter to the latter. At nine she is ready for her *breakfast*—the first meal not being so denominated and in fact considered as nothing at all. If her mistress be awake, the nurse will amuse her with innumerable stories relative to her former places; and she will not fail to make herself out the very best nurse in the world. She will describe how one lady was inconsolable because she could not have her at the desired time; how another lady would eat nothing unless prepared by the said nurse's own hands, how a third would have died if it had not been for her care and attention; and how she never slept a wink nor put her clothes off once for a whole month while in attendance upon another lady. Then she is sure to be well connected and to have seen better days; and if asked for her address, she is certain to reply, "Lord bless you, my dear: all you have to do is to send and in-

quire for me in such-and-such a street, and any body will tell you where I live." In fact she is as well known in her quarter of the town as the Queen is at Pimlico. But—to continue the category of meals—at eleven o'clock she is quite prepared for a mutton-chop and half a pint of stout; and she forces a basin of gruel down her mistress's throat, accompanied with many a "Poor dear, I'm sure you must want it!" At two o'clock she has a good appetite for her dinner; and then she manages to get on pretty comfortably till tea-time. The nurse is very fond of her tea, and likes it strong. After tea, as her mistress most likely sleeps, she gets hold of an odd volume of a romance, or a newspaper not more than a week old; and it is ten to one that she believes every word she reads in both. If her mistress happen to be awake, the nurse will comment upon what she reads. The newspaper, especially, is sure to set her talking on the "hardness of the times," and arouse all her reminiscences of "when she was a gal." She will often express her mysterious wonder at "what the world is coming to," and invariably speaks as if every thing had undergone a great change for the worst. She is sure to know a poor family whom she is mainly instrumental in saving from starvation; and she is equally certain to descend upon the necessity of sobriety and frugality amongst the working classes. Then she remembers that it is time "for missus to take her medicine;" but when she goes to the shelf or the cupboard, she stays a little longer there than is quite necessary to pour out the medicine aforesaid, and, as she approaches the bed to administer the same, she wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, and her eyes are observed to water. The invalid lady may now thank her stars if she be not assailed with an odour of ardent spirit while she receives her medicine from the hand of the nurse. Well, the time passes away somehow or another until the supper hour; and it is a remarkable fact, that the nurse never seems wearied of the monotony of her avocation. But, then, in the evening she manages to get half-an-hour's chat with the servants down stairs; and the chat is rendered the more pleasant by a little drop of something short out of a black bottle which the cook mysteriously produces from the cupboard. On these occasions the nurse exhibits all her importance. She assures the listening domestics that it was very fortunate she happened to be sent for to attend upon "missus," as if any other nurse had been called in the results would have been most unpleasantly different. She then expresses her opinion of the medical attendant; and her estimation of this gentleman is invariably regulated by the amount of his liberality towards her. If he gave her the odd shillings which accompanied the sovereigns in the little piece of paper containing the fee, then he is sure to be a very clever man indeed; but if he forgot this important duty, then in the nurse's estimation he is certain to be a most unfit doctor to call in; and "it was quite a wonder that he didn't kill poor dear missus." Having thus delivered her opinion, which is received as gospel by the servants, she hastens up stairs again, and relates to her mistress her own version of the conversation which has taken place down below. After supper she no longer partakes of ardent spirit on the spot, and unblushingly brews herself a potent glass. But then she is sure to have an excuse—such a dreadful pain in the stomach, or a bad cold; and her mistress, whose peace of mind depends on keeping her at-

tendant in a good humour, says in a mild, languid voice, "Do make yourself comfortable, nurse!" And the nurse obeys the hint to the very letter. The liquor induces her to descend upon spirits in general; and she is sure to inform her mistress that the *Duke of Wellington* does not sell near such good things as the *Duck and Drake*; but that "the beautifullest gin is at the public round the corner." Sometimes—and this is one of the worst features in her character—the nurse will take it into her head to relate gloomy stories to her mistress; and when once she gets on this subject, the devil himself could not stop her. She tells how she knew a lady who went on very well for ten days, and then popped off all on a sudden; or else she was once in a house which caught on fire in the middle of the night, and the poor lady and child were burnt to death. If the husband should happen to be out late, the nurse, when she is in this gloomy vein, talks mysteriously of the danger of the streets; and says how she knew a gentleman who was run over by an omnibus during the fog. But, in justice to the nurse, we must observe, that these horrible subjects are not very frequently touched on by her—and only when she gets somewhat maudlin with too much ardent spirit or bottled stout. For the first week she is in her place, no one comes to see her; but in the course of the second, she is visited by her married daughter and her married daughter's eldest girl. During the third week, the nurse is constantly wanted by people who come to see her, or inquire for her; and at the beginning of the fourth the front door bell is rung frantically, and the nurse hears, with a countenance so innocent that it is almost impossible to think she has pre-arranged the whole matter, that Mrs. So-and-so, whom she has pledged herself to attend upon, is just taken in labour, and she (the nurse) must go to her directly. Her mistress is by this time well enough to do without her; and the nurse receives her full month's wages for three week's attendance.

But let us return to Sir Christopher Blunt, whom we left at that pleasant point when, having undergone the ceremony of embracing the babe which, according to his lady's account, heaven had sent him, he wended his way back to the drawing-room.

At that precise moment Sir Christopher would have given just one half of his fortune to be enabled to undo all he had done three months previously. He had married in haste, and he now repented at leisure. But it was too late to retract; and he found, to his infinite mortification, that he must "grin and bear it."

The accoucheur shortly entered the room to report that "all was going on as well as could be expected;" and, having received his fee, he took his departure.

Soon afterwards the pompous and self-sufficient Dr. Wagtail made his appearance, and received his fee, which, out of sheer ostentation, the knight rendered as liberal as the physician had anticipated.

These little matters being disposed of, Sir Christopher rang the bell, ordered up a bottle of claret and was about to console himself with the solitary enjoyment of the same, when an astounding double knock and tremendous ring at the front-door startled him so fearfully that he spilt the wine over his red trousers and nearly upset the table on which his elbow was leaning.

"Who can this be?" he exclaimed aloud.

"Captain O'Blunderbuss!" cried the footman,

throwing open the door as wide as possible to afford ingress to the swaggering officer.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE KNIGHT AND THE CAPTAIN

"CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS!" murmured Sir Christopher, in a faint tone, as he sank back dismayed into his seat.

"Be the power-rs! and how are ye, my hearty old cock?" was the polite salutation of the gallant gentleman, as, advancing close up to the knight, he grasped his hand and shook it with as much energy as if he were a policeman carrying off a starving mendicant to the station-house for the *heinous crime* of begging.

"Thank you, Captain—I—I'm pretty well," responded Sir Christopher.

"Well, that's a blessing, be Jasus!" cried the Captain, coolly taking a seat. "Is it claret that you're after drinking, Sir-r Christopher?" he demanded, taking up the bottle and holding it between his eyes and the lamp. "Illicit stuff in its way—but not my lish. Have ye no potheen in the house, Sir Christopher-r?"

"Potheen?" repeated the knight, not understanding the name nor half liking the intrusion.

"Is it you, Sir-r Christopher, that don't know what rale Irish potheen is?" cried the Captain. "Why, there's niver a child in ould Ir-reland that can't spell potheen. Whiskey, Sir Christopher—whiskey! But I'll save ye the throuble of ringing for it yourself:"—and, with these words, Captain O'Blunderbuss applied his hand most vigorously to the bell-pull.

The footman answered the summons.

"Your masher says, sirrah," exclaimed the Captain, "that ye're to bring up a bottle of the best Irish whiskey—rale potheen—with a tumbler, a spoon, a lemon, hot water, and sugar—and look shar-ry about it, too!"

The domestic retired, and Sir Christopher stared in amazement at the Captain; for the worthy knight was so astounded by the free and easy manners of his visitor, that he was not quite certain whether he, Sir Christopher Blunt, was actually in his own house at the moment, or whether he was in some public coffee-room where every one had a right to order the waiter about as he chose.

"I hope you're not offended with me, Sir Christopher-r, by making myself at home?" said the Captain: "but it isn't me that's the boy to stand on any ceremony."

The knight thought that his visitor could never have said a truer thing in his life.

"Not I, be Jasus!" continued Captain O'Blunderbuss. "But thin I'm the man to let others do the same with me; and if you should ever find yourself in the wilds of Conamar-r-ra, Sir Christopher, just ask the first naked urchin ye meet with to show the way to Bluntherbuss Park, and see if I won't trate ye as ye deserve to be treated. Blood and murder! it's me that keeps open house save whin the sheriff's-officers are prowling about the neighbourhood, which is generally from the 1st of January to the 31st of December in every year."

The servant now made his appearance with the

whiskey and the *et ceteras* which the gallant gentleman had ordered; and the said gallant gentleman straightway began to brew himself some toddy, with the air of an individual who had had nothing stronger than mild ale to drink all day long.

"May I request to be informed—" began Sir Christopher, his courage reviving now that the Captain's visit appeared to be one altogether of an amicable nature.

"Faith! and is it to be informed ye'd be?" ejaculated O'Blunderbuss, as he stirred his whiskey-and-water up with the spoon. "But do n't alarm yourself, Sir Christopher-r: my call this evening was merely jst to ask ye how ye do and present ye with a little note from that rale broth of a boy, Misther Frank Curtis."

"Frank—my nephew!" exclaimed Sir Christopher: "what can he want with me? Surely 'tis not to congratulate—But, no—he can't have heard of *that* yet."

Be the power-rs! and is there any tling to congratulate ye upon, Sir Christopher?" cried the Captain. "Have ye been made a baronet—or elected an alderman?"

"I would have you know, Captain O'Blunderbuss," said the knight, in a solemn tone, "that I was once so unadvised as to put up for Portsoken—"

Be Jasus! have nothing to do with Port—it lies heavy on the stomach, my frind!" interrupted the gallant officer. "Dhrink potheen—and you'll niver grow old nor yet gray. But we were spaking of congratulations. Is it possible that your dear wife has tumbled down stairs and broken her neck? or has she presented ye with a pledge of her affection?"

"Since you must know, Captain O'Blunderbuss," responded the Knight, "it is—the latter."

"I give ye joy, old brick!" vociferated the gallant officer and seizing Sir Christopher's hand, he subjected it to such a process of violent shaking, that the victim almost yelled out with agony. "But from what Frank tould me," continued the Captain, at length relinquishing the hand which he had so unmercifully squeezed, "I thought you had n't been married long enough for such a happy evint to take place. However—I wish ye joy, my frind; and now to business. Read this little bit of a note, and ye'll be charmed with the kind way in which Frank Curtis spakes of ye."

The knight received the letter which the Captain handed to him, but ere he had time to break the seal, the door opened and the nurse made her appearance.

"Well, nurse—what is it?" demanded Sir Christopher.

"Please, sir," was the reply, "missus wants to know who it was as come with such a chemendous knock and ring that it has set her poor head a-aching ready to split, and the blessed babby a-crying as if he was in fits."

"Tell your misthress, nurse," exclaimed the visitor, in an imperious tone, "that it's Captain O'Bluntherbuss, of Bluntherbuss Park, Ir-r-reland," with an awful rattling of the r's; "and prisint my best respects to your lady and the babby."

"Thank'ee, sir," replied the nurse; "but missus says, Sir Christopher, please, that she hopes you won't make no noise in the house."

"Very well—very well, my good woman!" exclaimed the knight hastily. "Tell your misthress

I shall not be engaged long, and will come up and see her presently."

"Wery good, sir;"—and the nurse withdrew.

Sir Christopher then proceeded to open the letter; but it was with trembling hands,—for the visit of the nurse had thrown him into a most unpleasant state of nervousness—he being well aware that he should receive a blowing up on account of the Captain's call,—although no one could possibly wish more devoutly than himself that such a call had not taken place.

"Ye thrimble, Sir Christopher!" cried the Captain; "but there's no need to be alar-r-med—for your nev-vy has n't sent ye a challenge. So let your mind be at pace—and read the little note at your leisure. I'm in no hurry for an hour or two."

And indeed the Captain appeared to be quite comfortable; for he brewed himself a second glass of whiskey and water—threw some coals upon the fire—and trimmed the lamp in such a way that the flame rose above the globe.

Meantime Sir Christopher perused the letter with great attention, and did not altogether seem to relish its contents.

"I really cannot oblige my nephew in this respect," he said, fidgetting the paper about in his hands. "The truth is—he has not behaved altogether well to me—nor to Lady Blunt;—and if I was to do this for him, Lady Blunt would be so angry. He must fight his own way in the world, Captain O'Blunderbuss, as I did; for I have no hesitation to admit that I rose from nothing—indeed, I glory in the fact: and having filled the high and responsible office of Sheriff, with credit to myself and advantage to my fellow-citizens—"

"Damn the high office of Shrivff!" exclaimed the gallant gentleman, striking his fist upon the table. "I want my money—and it is n't Captain O'Bluntherbuss that ye'll be afther putting off in this snaking fashion."

"But, my dear sir," said the knight, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "I don't owe you the money."

"Be Jasus! but your nev-vy does—and therefore it's all in the family!" cried the Captain.

"That is a proposition I cannot agree to, my dear sir," returned the knight.

"D'ye mane to differ from me?" demanded the Captain, looking desperately ferocious.

"Why—as for that—I—I—"

"D'ye mane to differ from me, I repate?" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss, again striking the table with his fist, but so violently this time that the bottles and glasses danced a hornpipe: "answer me that, Sir-r Christopher-r!"

"I do n't wish to offend you, Captain—I could n't wish to do that; but," added the knight, "I must beg leave most respectfully to dissent from the proposition that I am in any way answerable for the debts of Mr. Curtis. And since he has married a lady of fortune, let him be candid with her at once; and—"

"Is it candid that he's to be, when the wife would kick up hell and blazes?" cried O'Blunderbuss. "But I tell you purty frankly, my frind, that if ye do n't shell out the seven hunthred pounds—"

"Seven hundred!" ejaculated Sir Christopher. "It says only five hundred in the letter."

"I don't care two r-raps for the letter," answered the Captain: "all I know is that Misther Frank Curtis, your nev-vy, had seven hunthred of

me—and, be Jasus! I'll have seven hunthred of you."

"It can't be done," said Sir Christopher doggedly. "Then, be the holy poker-r! I'll shoot ye to-morrow mornn'!" vociferated the gallant officer: "so name your find; and I'll take care that ye shan't be afther shir-r-king this time as ye did when ye had to mate my find Morthaunt."

"Really, Captain O'Blunderbuss, this strange conduct on your part—is—is—" stammered the knight, scarcely knowing what to say or do; while his countenance became elongated to an awful extent.

"Sthrange!—sthrange! do ye say?" exclaimed the Captain. "Why, ye're adding insult to injury, man. But don't desayve yourself—ye won't come the counterfeit-crank over me, be Jasus! I'm not the boy to be bullied afther this fashion, Sir Christopher-r. So shell out the eight hunthred—or be the Lor-r-d Harry!—"

"Eight hundred!" murmured the miserable knight, now cruelly alarmed at the ferocious manner and the progressive attempt at extortion on the part of his visitor.

"Eight hunthred is what I lent, and eight hunthred is what I'll have back," said the Captain, in a determined tone: "and if ye're afther denying your debts of honour-r, Sir Christopher, I'll make such an example of ye as shall let all the wor-rld know what ye are—as soon as I've shot ye dead, which I'll do in the mornn'!"

"You surely would n't commit such a crime—without—without just provocation?" urged the knight, in a coaxing manner.

"I'll not hear another word of palthry excuse, sirrah," replied the Captain, starting from his seat; "and if the money isn't forthcoming in the twinkling of a bed-post, I'll flay ye first and shoot ye afterwards."

"Oh! dear—Oh! dear," said the wretched Sir Christopher: "what shall I do?—I would n't mind the five hundred that my nephew asks for—since he promises so faithfully to pay me again—but eight hundred—"

"Nine!" thundered the Captain. "D'ye mane to tell me as good as that I'm a liar-r, and that I can't recollect amounts?—Be Jasus! I niver was so insulted in my life—and nothing but blood can wash it away!"

"Blood!" murmured Sir Christopher: "my blood! and I the father of a family, as I may say."

"So much the more dishonour-r-able for ye to dispute a just debt, and thry to shir-rk off in this bastely fashion!" cried the Captain, twirling his moustache, and eyeing Sir Christopher in a way which made the latter tremble in every limb. "I always thought that ye was a man famous for your straight-for-ward dealings; but I'm desayved—grossly desayved;—and I'll send my find to ye to-morrow mornn', before ye've had time to break the shell of your first egg at breakfast."

"Well, Captain—to oblige you," said Sir Christopher, "I don't mind if I write a cheque for five hundred pounds; but I positively will give no more—I won't indeed—I can't."

"Put down the palthry five hunthred, then, on the ahraft," exclaimed the Captain; "and I'll make Mither Curtis folk me out the rest at his convey-nance."

The miserable Sir Christopher, though feeling that he had been completely bullied into the settle-

ment of the demand made upon him, nevertheless stood in such awful dismay of the warlike Irishman, that he wrote a cheque for the five hundred pounds, which said cheque the Captain secured about his person, exclaiming, "And now, my frind, I'll look over all the insulting words ye have applied to me this evening. But, be the power-r-s! if I had n't a great respect for ye, I'd make a mummy of ye before ye was twelve hours oulder."

Having thus spoken, the Captain tossed off the remainder of his whiskey-and-water, shook the knight violently by the hand once more, and took his departure, just as the nurse was coming down to desire that Sir Christopher would get rid of his guest and send up the keys of the wine-cellar to her ladyship.

Now, strange as it may appear to the reader,—considering all that they know relative to the character of Captain O'Blunderbuss,—it is nevertheless a fact that he never once thought of appropriating to his own use the amount just extorted from the knight. He was a man who would not hesitate to get into debt, without the least intention of ever paying the same,—he moreover thought that he had accomplished a highly meritorious deed in extorting the five hundred pounds from Sir Christopher: but he was honourable after his own fashion—that is to say, he would scorn to perpetrate an actual robbery, or to betray the trust reposed in him by an accomplice. He was, in fact, one of those curious, but not uncommon beings, who might be trusted with a thousand pounds to convey to the bank for a friend, but who would borrow eighteen-pence without the remotest intention of ever repaying it, and who thought that the most brilliant act a gentleman could achieve was to choose a creditor.

Accordingly, the clock had scarcely struck eleven, and Frank Curtis was already beginning to get uneasy, when the Captain's thundering knock at the front door in Baker Street, proclaimed his return; and in a few moments the young gentleman was made acquainted with the success experienced by his friend.

"And now, be the holy poker-r! we'll make a night of it," said the Captain, when, the front-door having been duly secured, the two worthies were once more seated in the dining-room: "and it's myself that'll tell ye stories and sing ye rale Irish songs to keep ye awake, my boy."

And a night they did make of it, heaven knows!—and tremendous inroads were effected upon the supply of gin then in the "garrison," as the Captain now termed the house. Such lies, too, as the Captain and Frank Curtis told each other! until the latter gentleman began to entertain the pleasing idea that the room was spinning round, and that there were four candles on the table instead of two. The gallant officer, on the other hand, carried his liquor like a man who was inaccessible to its enebriating fumes; and when Curtis fell dead drunk upon the carpet, the Captain considerably picked him up, tossed him over his shoulder as if he was a sack of potatoes, and thus transported him to the door of his wife's bed-room, at which he deposited the senseless gentleman, having intimated in stentorian tones that Mrs. Curtis would do well to rise and look to her husband.

The Captain then went down stairs again, finished the bottle last opened, and, throwing himself on a sofa, fell into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

TIM THE SNAMMER AND JOSH PEDLER OUT ON BUSINESS.

HE who delights in wandering amongst the mazes of this mighty city of London,—this wilderness of brick and mortar,—and who can view, with the eye of a philosopher or a moralizer, the various phases in which the metropolis is to be considered, may find ample food for reflection, and much changing interest of scene, if he post himself at that point in the Borough of Southwark, called Newington Butts.

From this point diverge Blackman Street, the Newington Road, the Borough Road, and Horse-monger Lane.

Blackman Street and the Newington Road constitute the great thoroughfare between London Bridge and the *Elephant and Castle* tavern; and incalculable are the multitudes—numerable are the vehicles, which pass along the busy way,—oh! so busy, because the love of money and the love of pleasure cause all those comings and goings,—those hurrying hither and thither,—those departures, and those returns!

What a tremendous conflict of interests,—what a wondrous striving to accomplish objects in view,—what an energy—what an activity—what an unwearied industry, are denoted by a great thoroughfare like this! Nor less does that bustle speak of recreation and enjoyment—parties of pleasure to end in dissipation—amusement diversion, and holiday, too often to be dearly paid for thereafter!

Close by Newington Butts you behold a portion of the wall of the Bench Prison, with its *chevaux de frise*, denoting rather the criminal prison than a place of confinement for unfortunate persons. What a horrible cruelty it is to incarcerate men who are unable to liquidate their liabilities—as if such imprisonment would place within their reach the philosopher's stone. Where one dishonest debtor finds his way thither, a dozen human beings who are enclosed within that gloomy wall, would gladly—willingly, acquit themselves of their responsibilities if they had the means. And shall the law be so framed that, in order to punish one, it must cruelly oppress twelve individuals? Is such a principle consistent with common sense, justice, or civilisation? Many and many a heart has been broken within those walls: many and many a fine spirit has been crushed down to the very dust; and the man who went into that prison with honourable feelings and generous sympathies, has gone forth prepared to play the part of a sneaking swindler. For a creditor to lock his debtor up in prison, is the same as if a master took away the tools from a mechanic and said, "Now do your work as usual." The Legislature does not understand this. It allows an expensive process to take place, so that the debtor who cannot originally pay 50*l.*, for instance, has his liabilities immediately increased to 60*l.*: then, when responding negatively to the demand for this larger sum, he is taken away from the avocations by pursuing which he might obtain the means to settle with his creditor, and is thrown into prison. The routine is precisely this:—If a person cannot pay a debt, you increase it for him: and, having increased it, you tie his hands so that he shall have no chance of paying it at all! Merciful heavens! is this common sense?

The system of imprisonment for debt falls terribly hard upon the poor. The gentleman, though reduced himself, has friends who can assist him; but the poor are too poor to aid each other. Then money can purchase bail when a schedule has been filed in the Insolvents' Court; but the poor man must languish in prison until his hearing. Oh! the advantages of wealth or wealthy connexions in this mercenary land!—oh! the benefits of being by birth a gentleman!

It was about ten o'clock in the evening, when Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler encountered each other, by appointment, at Newington Butts; and, as it was yet too early for the business which they had in hand, they repaired to a public-house hard by, where they drank porter, smoked pipes, and conversed, until the clock in the tap-room denoted the hour of eleven.

They then rose, paid their score, and took their departure,—bending their way into Horse-monger Lane.

Tim the Snammer now fell a few paces behind his comrade, Josh Pedler, who hurried a short distance up the lane, and stopped at the door of a house of mean, sordid, and sombre appearance.

He knocked at the door, which was opened by an old and hideous-looking woman, holding in her hand a candle, by the light of which she surveyed the visitor in a very suspicious manner.

"I want to speak to a genelman of the name of Bones which lives here," said Josh, placing his foot, with apparent carelessness, in such a way over the threshold that the door might not be shut against his inclination.

"No sich a person don't live here," returned the woman gruffly; and she was about to close the door, when Josh again addressed her.

"Well," said he, "if he don't pass by that there name, he does by another—and it's all the same. We ain't partickler, ma'am, as to names; but my business is partickler, though—and I've got an appointment with Mr. Benjamin Bones—or Old Death—or whatever else he calls his-self or is called by others."

"It ain't of no use a standing bothering here, my good man," said the woman, "cause yv—no sich a person lives here, I tell you—and I don't know sich a person by sich a name at all."

"Humbug!" cried Josh—and, giving a low, short whistle, he pushed into the house.

A moment had not elapsed ere Tim the Snammer was at his heels—the door was forcibly closed—the candle was wrested from the old woman's hand—and she was threatened with throttling if she attempted to raise an alarm.

The two men bound her with a cord, and carried her into the room opening from the passage. They then left her, vowing with terrible oaths to return and "do for her," if she dared make the slightest disturbance.

"There isn't a room on t'other side of the passage, is there, Tim?" demanded Josh of his companion, who carried the light.

"No. And now let's creep up stairs as gentle as if we was mice," said the Snammer.

"You've got your buikes, Tim?" asked Pedler.

"Yes—and a damned good clasp knife too," replied the ruffian, with a significant leer at his accomplice, and speaking in a low whisper. "I don't think we

that the average dividend paid upon the estates of persons who take the benefit of the Act is *one farthing* in the pound."

* The records of the Insolvent Debtors' Court prove

shall find any one else in the house besides that old woman and Ben Bones his-self, 'cause Mutton-Face Sal is a devilish keen one—and she would have found it out if there was any lodgers."

"Well, cut up stairs, Tim," said Josh Pedler, "and don't let us be a-standing here palavering—or the old scamp may overhear us and get out by the back windows, or some such a dodge. I'll go fust, if you like."

"No—I'll go fust, Josh," answered the Snammer; "for it's me that has got the most spite agin the ancient willain."

With these words, Tim Splint crept cautiously up the narrow and dirty stair-case, Josh Pedler following close behind him.

The robbers stopped at the door on the first landing, and knocked; but, no answer being returned, they broke it open in a few moments by means of a small stout chisel such as housebreakers are in the habit of using.

"Who's there?" cried the deep, sepulchral voice of Old Death, as he started from the arm-chair in which he had been taking a nap.

"It's only two of your friends," returned Tim the Snammer; "and as friends you had better treat us, too—or it'll be the wuss for you."

"I don't know that I ever treated you in any way but as friends," said old Death, glancing somewhat uneasily from the one to the other. "As for you, Tim—I can guess why you're angry with me; but I wasn't at liberty—I wasn't my own master, I can assure you—on that Saturday when I promised to get you out of the Jug; or I should have kept my word. But it's too long a story to tell you now—even if I was disposed to do so; and so the shortest way to make us all right, is for me to give you back the money that was placed in my hands by Josh Pedler."

"And what'll pay me for the two months of quod that I had all through you, you cheating old fence?" demanded Tim Splint, placing his back against the door in a determined manner.

"I could n't help it, Tim—I could n't help it," returned Old Death with a hideous grin. "And may be—may be," he added, with the hesitation habitual to him, "I can put something in your way, that will make up for the past."

"Well—that looks like business, at all events," observed Tim, exchanging a rapid glance with his companion; for it struck the two robbers at the same moment, that they should perhaps act prudently to join Old Death in any enterprise which he might have in hand, and then plunder him afterwards—provided that the affair he had to propose, gave promise of a better booty than that which they stood the immediate chance of obtaining from him.

Old Death looked leisurely round the small, mean, and ill-furnished room, as much as to say, "What can you hope to get out of me?"—for the meaning of the glances which he had observed to pass between the two robbers, was perfectly well understood by him.

Is the business you hinted at for to-night?" demanded Josh Pedler, after a brief pause.

"For to-night," replied Benjamin Bones. "But sit down, my good friends, and may be I can find a drain of brandy in the bottle for you."

"Thank'ee, we'll stand, old chap," said the Snammer; "but we shan't refuse the bingo, for all that."

Old Death regaled his two visitors each with a wine glass full of brandy, and then took a similar quantity himself.

"Yes," he said, continuing the discourse: "it is for to-night—and a good thing may be made of it, if you're staunch and resolute. In fact, I wanted to meet with a couple of such active fellows as you are, for I have been sadly used lately—in more ways than one."

"Well, what is it?" demanded Tim the Snammer. "You know that we're the lads to do any thing itought to be done; and I don't see the use of wasting time, if the business is really for to-night."

"I have had positive information," continued Old Death, his dark eyes gleaming snake-like beneath the shaggy brows that overhung them, "that a gentleman, who lives in a lonely house, not many miles off, this morning received a considerable sum of money at a banker's, on a cheque which he got cashed there; and in a few days he will pay it all away to his creditors—for he has been building a great number of houses at Norwood; and so I think," added Bones, with a horrible chuckle, "that it would be just as well to anticipate him."

"And can you rely on this information?" asked Tim the Snammer. "Come—let us know all the particulars."

"Two or three days ago he took into his service a man named John Jeffreys—a groom who was lately in the household of a certain Sir Christopher Blunt," said Old Death; "and this person sells his secrets to those who pay him best."

"In plain terms he's in your pay," exclaimed Josh Pedler. "Well—that's all right. What next?"

"Nothing more than that if you like to crack that crib, you can do it to-night; and I'll smash the notes, which will be of no use to you till they're melted into gold," answered Old Death; thereby intimating to them, first that he should take no active part in the business, and secondly that it would not be worth their while to cheat him of his share of the plunder, inasmuch as they were totally dependent on him for rendering the hoped-for booty at all available.

Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler consulted together for a few moments in low whispers.

"But how do we know," said the former, suddenly turning round upon Old Death, "that this is n't all a cursed plant to get us out of the house here—or may be to enslave us into some infernal trap—eh? Answer us that."

"Read John Jeffreys' note," said Old Death coolly, as he produced the letter from the pocket of his capacious old grey surtout coat.

Tim the Snammer, and Josh Pedler, accordingly read the contents of the paper, which ran as follows:—

"This cums to tel you, sir, that Master reserved a chek for about twelve undred pouns yesterday from Sir enry courtence, a barrow-night, and that master got it keshed this mornin at the bank, wich I no becos I had to go with him in the gigg to the bank, and I see him cum out of the bank a-countin the notes, and I no he will pay it all away in 2 or 3 days to his blders and arkitecks and carpinters at norwood. anny thing you leeve for mee in a broun paper parsel at the ushual crib will reech mee, Yuro fatheful servant,
"J. J."

"Satisfactory enow," exclaimed Tim the Snammer, with an appealing glance to his comrade, who nodded his head approvingly. "Well," continued the thief, "give us the necessary description of the place; and we'll be off at once. It's fortin that we've got our tools about us."

"Which you have used against my miserable lodging," observed Old Death, with a grim smile.



"However, I would rather you'd have introduced yourselves in that way, than not come at all; for I should have let this matter," he added, pointing to Jeffrey's note, which now lay on the table, "go by without attending to it. So it's lucky for us all that you did make your appearance; and if you serve me well in this case, you shall not want employment of my finding."

"Good again, old tulip," said Tim the Snammer; "and now tell us where this Mr. Torrings lives—or whatever his name is—and we will lose no time."

Old Death gave the necessary explanation; and the two men took their departure, having first acquainted their employer with the condition in which they had left the old woman down stairs—a piece of information which made him hasten to her rescue.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

PROCEED we now to Torrens Cottage, on the road to which place we have just left Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler.

It was past eleven o'clock, and Mr. Torrens was seated alone in his parlour, examining a pile of papers which lay before him. A decanter more than half emptied of its ruby contents, and a wine-glass also stood upon the table; and the flushed countenance of the unprincipled man showed that he had sought to drown the remorseful feelings of a restless conscience by means of the juice of the grape.

But he could not;—and though ten days had now elapsed since the sacrifice of the beautiful Rosamond had taken place, there were moments when the father felt even more acutely than on the fatal night when, in the solitude of his chamber, he endured the torments of the damned,—*mental torments, indescribably more severe than the most agonising of physical pain could possibly be!*

He had received the price of his infamy and her dishonour—the last portion of the "price of blood" he had drawn from the bankers in the morning—and he was now arranging and casting up his accounts to satisfy himself that he had actually obtained sufficient to settle all his liabilities.

But his occupation was every moment interrupted by a gush of terrible thoughts to his maddening

brain;—and if he laid down the pen, it was to grasp the bottle.

What would the world say if his black turpitude were to transpire?—how should he ever be able to meet Clarence Villiers and Adelaus again, if they were to become acquainted with Rosamond's dishonour? He knew that the baronet had hitherto managed somewhat to tranquillise the ruined girl by promises of marriage and eternal affection;—he was also aware that Rosamond had endeavoured to subdue her anguish as much as possible in order to avoid the chance of arousing any suspicion on the part of Mrs. Slingsby! But a term must at length arrive to those specious representations and mendacious assurances adopted by Sir Henry Courtenay to lull the agonising feelings of the unhappy girl;—and then—oh! it was then, that the danger would be terrible indeed! Of all this Mr. Torrens thought; and he suffered more acutely from his fears than from his consciousness of infernal iniquity.

The time-piece upon the mantle had struck the hour of eleven some time, and Mr. Torrens was in the midst of his terrible meditations, when a loud, long, and impatient knock at the front-door caused him to start from his seat.

He had already desired the servants not to sit up on his account, as it was probable that he should be occupied with his papers until a late hour in the night; and he was therefore now compelled to answer the summons itself.

A cold chill struck to his heart—for he entertained a presentiment of what was about to occur: indeed, such an anticipation was natural on his part when we reflect that his soul was a prey to conscious guilt, and that the knock at the door was hasty and imperative.

For a moment he staggered as if about to fall: then, calling all his firmness to his aid, he proceeded to open the front-door, the knocking at which was repeated with increased vehemence.

His presentiment was correct;—for, scarcely had he drawn back the bolt, when the door was pushed open—and Rosamond rushed into the house.

"My dearest father!" she exclaimed, and fell insensible into his arms.

He conveyed her to a sofa in the parlour, tore off her bonnet and shawl, and sprinkled water upon her pale—her very pale countenance.

Merciful heavens! how acute—how agonising was the pang which shot to his heart, as he contemplated that lovely brow on which innocence had so lately sate enthroned, until the spoiler had pressed the heated lips of lust thereon! Then for a few moment all the father's feelings were uppermost in his soul; and he gnashed his teeth with rage at the thought that he himself was dishonoured in that dishonoured daughter!

Oh! to have given her back her purity and her self-respect,—to have known that she could raise her head proudly in maiden pride,—to have been able to embrace her as the chaste and spotless being she was ere hell suggested its accursed machinations to achieve her destruction!

But it was too late!—Here lay the ruined child—and there were piled the notes and gold which had purchased her virtue!

Three or four minutes elapsed, and still Rosamond gave no signs of returning animation. Suddenly the father desisted from his endeavours to restore her; for an infernal thought flashed to his mind.

He would suffer her to die!

No sooner did the atrocious idea enter his soul, than he longed to see it fulfilled. He dared not meet her eyes—even should she be unsuspecting relative to his unnatural treachery. No—it were better that she should die!

But the infernal hopes of the wicked man were not to be realized;—and, monster that he was, he could not slay her with his own hands!

Slowly, at length, her bosom began to heave—a profound sigh escaped her—she opened her eyes, and gazed vacantly around.

"Rosamond," said her father, now mastering his feelings of bitter disappointment so far as to be able to speak in a kind tone: "Rosamond, dearest—what ails you? Fear not—you are at home! But why do you look at me so wildly!"

"Oh! my God—what have I done, that I should have deserved so much misery!" exclaimed the young girl, in a voice of the most piercing anguish, as she covered her face with her hands and burst into a flood of tears:—then, raising herself to a sitting posture on the sofa, she seized her father's hands, saying in a different and more profoundly melancholy tone, "My parent—my only friend! I am unworthy to look you in the face!"

"Do not speak thus, Rosamond," said Mr. Torrens, seating himself by his daughter's side, and maintaining a demeanour which bespoke the deepest interest in her behalf. "Something has cruelly afflicted you?" he added interrogatively—as if he had yet the fatal truth to learn!

"Oh! heavens—your kindness kills me, dearest father!" shrieked Rosamond. "Yes—never did you appear so kind to me before—and I—I—But, merciful Saviour! my brain is on fire!"

"My sweet child," returned Mr. Torrens, whose soul was a perfect hell as he listened to the words which came from his daughter's lips,—“you can surely have no secrets from me? Has any one caused you chagrin? Has any one dared to insult you? And what means this sudden arrival at home—at so late an hour—and when I fancied that you were staying with that excellent woman, Mrs. Slingsby?"

"Mrs. Slingsby!" repeated Rosamond, with a shudder which denoted the loathing and abhorrence she entertained for that woman. "Oh! my dear father, that Mrs. Slingsby is a fiend in human shape—a vile and detestable hypocrite, who conceals the blackest heart beneath the garb of religion!"

"Rosamond—Rosamond—you know not what you are saying!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens, affecting to be profoundly surprised and even hurt at these emphatic accusations.

"Alas! I know too well—oh! far too well, the truth of all I am saying!" said Rosamond, a hectic glow of excitement appearing upon her cheeks, hitherto so ashy pale. "Yes, father—that woman is a disgrace to her sex! This evening—but two hours ago—I accidentally heard a few words pass between her and Sir Henry Courtenay——"

"Sir Henry Courtenay is at least an honourable man," said Mr. Torrens.

"Sir Henry Courtenay is a monster!" cried Rosamond emphatically; then, bursting into tears again, she threw herself at her father's feet, exclaiming, "Oh! that I had a mother to whom I could unburthen all the woes that fill my heart:—but to you—to you—my dearest parent—how can your

daughter confess that she has been ruined—dishonoured—undone?”

“Unhappy girl!” cried the hypocrite, affecting a tone and manner denoting mingled indignation and astonishment: “what dreadful things are these that you have come home to tell me?”

“The truth, my dear father—the horrible, the fatal truth!” continued Rosamond, in a fearfully excited tone.

“Speak lower—lower, my child,” said Mr. Torrens: “the servants will be alarmed—they will overhear you. And now resume your seat near me—rise from that humiliating posture—and—”

“Humiliating indeed,” interrupted Rosamond, sinking her voice to a comparative whisper, but with an utterance that was almost suffocated by the dreadful emotions raging within her bosom:—“because I myself am so signally humiliated!” she added. “And yet I am innocent, dear father—it was not my fault—not for worlds would I have strayed from the path of virtue! But a hideous plot—a diabolical scheme of treachery—devised between that bad woman and that still more dreadful man—”

“No more—no more, Rosamond!” exclaimed Mr. Torrens, still maintaining a well-affected semblance of indignation and astonishment. “I understand you but too well—and you shall be avenged!”

“Alas! vengeance will not make me what I once was—a happy and spotless girl!” said Rosamond: “and now that I am dishonoured, it would require but the contumely with which the world would treat me, to drive me to utter desperation—to madness, or to suicide!”

Mr. Torrens said all he could to console his unhappy child; and he very readily promised her to abandon all ideas of vengeance on those who had been the authors of her shame.

“Until this evening,” said Rosamond, her head reclining upon her father’s shoulder, “I had hoped that Sir Henry Courtenay would repair the wrong he had done me by means of marriage,—for, alas! my dear father, I loved him! But—two hours ago—I overheard a few words pass between him and Mrs. Slingsby,—a few words which riveted me to the spot where I was at first only an involuntary listener. Then I became a willing and attentive eavesdropper,—for, oh! the little which had already met my ears, intimately—too intimately regarded myself! And, dear father, you can conceive with what horror and dismay I learnt enough to convince me, that she whom I had loved and esteemed as a dear friend and a model of perfection, was a vile—an abandoned—an infamous woman,—the mistress of Sir Henry Courtenay, and in the way to become a mother also! I could not believe my ears—I fancied that I was dreaming. But, alas! it was indeed a frightful reality;—and then I heard that I had been sold,—yes, sold—I, your daughter, sold to Sir Henry Courtenay,—and, I suppose, by that dreadful woman! Yes—yes—father,” she continued wildly, “I was sold to his arms,—and he never intended to marry me! I screamed not,—I uttered not a word: I was crushed too low—I had too great a load of misery upon my soul to be able to give vent to my feelings; but I dragged myself away from the spot where I had overheard that terrible discourse,—a veil had fallen from before my eyes, and I saw all the extent of my hopeless position in its true light. How I managed to reach my bed-room I know not:

my brain began to whirl, and I thought that I should go mad! Of what followed I have but a dim recollection; but methinks that, having put on my bonnet and shawl, I was flying from the house, when Sir Henry Courtenay pursued me down the stairs—and how I escaped from him I cannot say! There was a chaos in my bewildered brain, and when I was enabled to collect my scattered thoughts—when consciousness, as I may term it, came back, I found myself hurrying along the streets. I looked round, fearful of being pursued; but there was no cause for alarm. Nevertheless, I hastened on,—and all that long distance have I accomplished on foot, dear father, for, oh! I felt that home was the place where my deep sorrows would receive sympathy, and where only I could hope to enjoy security. And now, by beloved parent,” added Rosamond, throwing her arms around his neck, “you will not spurn your unhappy daughter,—you will not thrust her from you! My God! why did I ever reveal to you all this? Oh! it was because my heart was so full of woe, that if I had not unburdened it to you in the hope of receiving consolation, it would have broken—it would have broken!”

“Rosamond,” said Mr. Torrens, “you did well to reveal all these dreadful things to me; because I alone am the proper person to counsel and console you. A fearful crime,” he continued, shuddering at his own monstrous duplicity, “has been perpetrated; but, alas! the criminals must go unpunished. Yes,—Rosamond, you were right when you declared that vengeance would lead only to exposure; and that exposure would kill you. My poor child, not even your sister must be made acquainted with this awful calamity.”

“No—no!” exclaimed Rosamond: “it is sufficient that you are aware of the ignominious treatment which I have received! Not for worlds would I have the bridal happiness of my dearest sister poisoned by the revelation of my wrongs! And Clarence, too—Clarence—oh! from him, of all men, must this secret be kept; or he would, perhaps, be urged to wreak on his aunt, and on that vile baronet, a vengeance which would lead to exposure, and render Adelaïs miserable for ever!”

“It charms me, Rosamond,” said Mr. Torrens, “to perceive that the wrongs heaped upon you have not impaired your prudence. Between you and me shall this secret now remain,—for, depend upon it, the authors of this cruel outrage will not themselves be anxious to publish their own infamy. You are now beneath the paternal roof—and here you are certain to enjoy security; and from this night forth, Rosamond, let us place a seal on our lips so far as the one dread topic is concerned.”

“And you, my father,” asked the ruined girl,—“shall you not love me the less? Shall you not look with loathing and abhorrence upon your daughter? Oh! if there be a change in your sentiments towards me, I shall have no alternative save to die!”

The miserable and criminal father embraced his dishonoured child, and said every thing he could to console her.

Rosamond then retired to her chamber,—that chamber which she had left ten days previously a pure and spotless virgin, and to which she now returned a disfigured and ruined girl!

Mr. Torrens remained in the parlour.

Amidst all the horrible thoughts that forced themselves upon his mind, he saw one glimmering:

of consolation: and this was that Rosamond suspected not his complicity in the nefarious plot which had destroyed her. It was evident that in the conversation which she had overheard between Mrs. Slingsby and the baronet, *his* connivance had only been hinted at,—too darkly and mysteriously for Rosamond to comprehend the meaning of those words which alluded to the fact of her having been *sold*!

But what pen can describe the tortures which the guilty man experienced, as he pondered on the scene that had just occurred? In spite of that gleam of solace he was the prey to ineffable anguish,—for he could not help feeling as a *father*: nature asserted her empire,—and he was in despair as he contemplated the awful crime which had led to the dishonour of his own child!

Never had she appeared to him so beautiful as when, ashy pale, she had awakened from the deep trance into which she fell on crossing the parental threshold;—never did he feel more inclined to love her, or to be proud of her charms, than when he afterwards saw her kneeling at his feet, the light of the lamp falling with Rembrandt effect upon her up-raised countenance! Alas! through him was she ruined—by his machinations was she destroyed! And of what avail was that beauty now, since honour was lost?

He fixed his eyes upon the gold, and endeavoured to console himself with the contemplation of the glittering metal.

It seemed dross—vile dross in his eyes; and could he have recalled the deeds of the last ten days, he would gladly have fallen back into the inextricable labyrinth of his pecuniary difficulties, and have dared even the disgrace and punishment of a debtors' prison, so that he might not have had to reproach himself with *the sale of his daughter's virtue*!

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

RETRIBUTION.

It was long past midnight—and Mr. Torrens was still pacing the parlour with uneven steps, when a low double knock at the front-door aroused him from his painful meditations.

Wondering who could visit the cottage at that late hour, he hastened to reply to the summons; and, to his surprise, the lustre of the parlour-lamp which he carried in his hand, streamed full upon the pale and agitated countenance of Sir Henry Courtenay.

Making a sign to the baronet not to speak, Mr. Torrens led the way into the parlour; and the visitor, in the excitement of the feelings which had brought him to the cottage, neglected to shut the front-door close as he entered, but merely pushed it back in such a way that the bolt of the lock did not catch.

This little incident was unperceived by the two gentlemen.

When they were both in the parlour, Mr. Torrens shut the room-door, and said in a low whisper, "She has come home!"

"Thank God! she is safe then!" observed the baronet, also in a subdued voice. "The fact is, Mrs. Slingsby and myself were so dreadfully frightened that she might either make away with herself, or

else adopt some measure that would lead to a certain exposure, that we have both been hunting for her through all the streets at the West End; and at last I determined, late as it was, to come over and acquaint you with her flight. But it never struck me that I should hear of her return home."

"She is unaware of my sad complicity in the dreadful business," replied Mr. Torrens sternly. "But pray repeat to me the whole conversation which took place between Mrs. Slingsby and yourself, and which she unfortunately overheard. I shall then be enabled to judge whether reflection on that discourse may lead her to imagine that her own father was indeed a party to her ruin; for I must confess that I have terrible fears lest she should indeed imbibe such a suspicion."

"Give me a tumbler of wine, Torrens," said the baronet, throwing himself upon the sofa which had so lately been pressed by his victim when in a state of insensibility: "I am regularly exhausted, for I have walked all the way hither;—and, when I have a little recovered myself, I will detail all the conversation which took place between me and Mrs. Slingsby, as nearly as I shall be able to recollect it."

Mr. Torrens produced a bottle of wine from the sideboard, he having already emptied the decanter upon the table.

"Help yourself, Sir Henry," he said: "and in the meantime I will steal cautiously up stairs and see if Rosamond be yet retired to rest—for I would not for worlds have her come down and find you here."

"A wise precaution," observed the baronet.

Mr. Torrens accordingly quitted the parlour, and hastened up stairs. He stopped at the door of his daughter's chamber, and listened. Profound sobs and impassioned ejaculations, indicative of terrible grief, met his ears; and he grew alarmed lest she should feel herself so thoroughly wretched and lonely as to be unable to sleep, and perhaps return to the parlour.

He accordingly knocked gently at the door, and Rosamond speedily opened it.

She had not as yet divested herself of a particle of her clothing, nor made any preparation to retire to rest, and her countenance was so truly woe-begone—so thoroughly the picture of a deeply-seated grief, that even her iron-hearted father was affected to tears. She threw her arms around his neck, and thanked him for his kind solicitude. He remained with her nearly half-an-hour, exerting all his power of language to console her; and the anxiety which he experienced to induce her to seek her couch, so that he might return to the parlour and get rid of Sir Henry Courtenay as soon as possible, rendered him so eloquent and so effective in the (to him) novel art of administering solace, that he succeeded fully.

"Now I am convinced that you do not loathe, despise, and hate your daughter," said Rosamond at length; "and this impression has removed an immense weight from my mind. Though true happiness may never more be mine, yet shall I find a substitute in Christian resignation to my fate; and henceforth, dear father, I will not make you unhappy by compelling you to act the part of a comforter. And now, good night, my only friend—my beloved parent; and fear not that I shall give way again to that violent outpouring of grief in which you so kindly interrupted me."

Mr. Torrens embraced his daughter, and a pang shot to his heart as he thought of his infernal conduct towards that good and affectionate girl!

As he descended the stairs he heard her lock her chamber-door; and he was just congratulating himself upon the success of his attempt to console her, when the murmuring sounds of voices, apparently coming from the front parlour, caused him to redouble his pace thither—for the idea flashed to his mind that Mrs. Slingsby might also have visited the cottage in her alarm concerning Rosamond, and that the baronet had probably afforded her admission while he was up stairs with his daughter.

* * * * *

Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler, bent on their predatory intent, and hoping to reap a good harvest at the house of Mr. Torrens, approached that dwelling nearly half an hour after Sir Henry Courtenay had entered it.

Perceiving a light gleaming from the divisions in the parlour-shutters, they crept cautiously up to the window, and through those crevices beheld the glittering gold piled upon the table, and a person lying upon the sofa, apparently in a profound sleep.

The fact was that the baronet was completely exhausted with his long walk from Old Burlington Street to the Cottage; and, having tossed off a tumbler of wine, he lay down on the sofa to await Mr. Torrens' return.

But we have seen that the father had found his daughter in such a state of profound affliction as to be totally unable to leave her for nearly half an hour; and during that interval an irresistible drowsiness stole over Sir Henry Courtenay, — speedily wrapping him in a deep slumber.

Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler were determined to risk "the crack," in spite of the sleeper whom they descried upon the sofa, and whom they believed to be Mr. Torrens; for neither was this gentleman nor the baronet known to them by sight.

With their housebreaking implements they were on the point of making an attempt on the front-door; when it yielded to their touch, and swung noiselessly open. At this they were not at all surprised; for it immediately struck them that John Jeffreys had expected the visit that night, and had left the door ajar on purpose.

They stole into the house, and succeeded in entering the parlour without arousing the baronet.

Tim the Snammer instantly drew forth his clasp-knife, and, bending over Sir Henry Courtenay, held the murderous weapon close to his throat, while Josh Pedler hastily secured the notes and gold about his person.

"We may as well have the plate, if there is any," whispered this individual to his companion. "In fact, we'll have a regular ransack of the place; and if he awakes—"

"I'll cut his infernal throat in a jiffy," added Tim the Snammer.

Josh grinned an approval of this summary mode of proceeding, and opened one of the side-board drawers. But the noise which a sugar-basin or some such article made inside the drawer, by falling over with the sudden jerk, aroused the sleeper.

Sir Henry Courtenay started—opened his eyes—beheld a strange countenance hanging over him—and was about to utter a cry of alarm, when the

terrible clasp-knife was drawn rapidly and violently across his throat.

There was a dull, gurgling noise—a convulsive quivering of the entire frame,—but not a groan—much less an exclamation of terror,—and Sir Henry Courtenay was no more!

"Come along, Tim," said Josh Pedler, whose face was ghastly pale. "We've done enough for to-night."

"Yes—let us be off," returned the murderer, now shuddering at the dreadful deed which he had just perpetrated.

And they were issuing from the room, when the noise of footsteps on the stairs made them redouble their speed to gain the front-door.

It was Mr. Torrens who had thus alarmed them; but they escaped without molestation—for when that gentleman reached the hall, and beheld two men rushing towards the front-door, he was himself seized with such profound terror—painfully strung as his feelings had been that night—that he was for a few moments stupified, and rivetted to the spot.

But when he saw the front-door close behind the strangers, he took courage—hastily secured it within—and then hurried to the parlour, in agony of fear lest his gold and notes should have become the prey of plunderers!

One glance at the table was sufficient:—the money was gone!

Mr. Torrens dashed his open palm against his forehead with frantic violence, and was about to utter a cry of rage and despair, when the remembrance of his unhappy daughter sealed his lips.

At the same instant he looked towards the sofa;—but, holy God! what a spectacle met his view!

For there lay the baronet with his head nearly severed from his body,—murdered—barbarously murdered upon the very sofa where his victim had so lately reposed in trance-like insensibility. On that sofa slept he his last sleep; and, even in that appalling moment when Mr. Torrens recoiled, shuddering and shocked, from the dreadful sight, it struck him that there was something of retributive justice not only in the loss of his own treasure but also in the death of Sir Henry Courtenay!

The frightened man uttered not a murmur as that spectacle encountered his eyes. His amazement was of so stupifying a nature that it sealed his lips—paralysed his powers of utterance. With staring orbs he gazed on the grisly corpse from which he recoiled staggeringly; and several minutes elapsed ere he could so far command his presence of mind, as even to become aware of his own dreadful predicament.

But as the truth dawned upon him, he was seized with indescribable alarms—with horrible apprehensions.

The double crime of robbery and murder, had been perpetrated so speedily and so noiselessly, that not a soul in the house was alarmed by any unusual sound—and Mr. Torrens felt the sickening conviction that it would be a difficult thing to persuade a jury that *he himself* was innocent! Suspicion must inevitably attach itself to him:—circumstantial evidence would be strong against him! In a word, the appalling truth broke in upon him, that *he* would be accused of the assassination of Sir Henry Courtenay!

Mr. Torrens sate down, and, burying his face in his hands, fell into a profound but most painful meditation.

Should he raise an alarm—arouse Jeffreys and the

female-servant, as well as his daughter—and proclaim all he knew about the horrible transaction! No!—something whispered in his ear that he would not be believed. Rosamond, not knowing that he was the baronet's accomplice in achieving her dishonour, would naturally conceive that the murder was the result of paternal vengeance. It was, then, impossible to suffer the occurrence to transpire. But what was he to do with the body?—how dispose of it? Terrible dilemma!

All the atrocity of his crime towards his daughter now returned with a tremendously augmenting intensity to his mind. His punishment on earth had already begun:—he was doomed—accursed. Wretched man! gold was thy destroyer! Ah! gold—but thou hast lost thy gold,—and in a few days the creditors who yet remain unpaid, will be upon thee! But—

What!—does such an idea actually strike him?—urging him to plunder the murdered victim of any coin which there may be about the corpse! Yes.—and now behold the father, who sold the honour of his child, about to examine the pockets of that child's assassinated ravisher?

The purse contains some fifteen or sixteen sovereigns; and these Mr. Torrens self-appropriates. The pocket-book of the deceased is next scrutinized. But there are no Bank-notes—nothing save papers and memoranda, totally valueless.

Mr. Torrens stamps his foot with rage:—his predicament is truly awful. Ruin still menaces him on one side in respect to his affairs—for, having reckoned on the money to be produced by the sale of his daughter's virtue, he had contracted fresh liabilities within the last ten days: and on the other side is the terrible danger in which the presence of that corpse may involve him! Add to these sources of agonising feelings, the conviction that the sacrifice of Rosamond will, after all, have proved ineffectual in respect to the complete settlement of his affairs, even should he succeed in burying the more serious event—namely the murder—in impenetrable mystery,—and the wretched state of mind in which Mr. Torrens was now plunged, may be conceived.

He rose from the chair, on which he had a second time flung himself, after plundering the corpse, and approached the time-piece.

It was half-past one o'clock.

But as Mr. Torrens glanced at the dial, which thus told him how short an interval remained for him to take some decisive step, if he really intended to dispose of the corpse before the servants should be stirring, he caught a glimpse of his countenance in the mirror over the mantel.

He recoiled—he shrank back with horror.

Was it indeed *his own* countenance that he saw?

Or was it that of some quiet ghost, wandering near the spot where its mortal tenement had been cruelly murdered?

He turned round suddenly, to avoid farther contemplation of that ghastly visage;—and again he recoiled from an object of terror—staggered—and would have fallen, had he not caught the back of a chair for support.

For in the half open door way he beheld a human face, which was withdrawn the moment his eyes encountered it.

Driven to desperation, and reckless now of what might happen to him, the maddened man rushed into the hall, in time to observe a figure turn the angle of the staircase.

In another moment he had caught that figure by the arm; and, dragging the person forcibly down, beheld his new man-servant John Jeffreys, by the light of the lamp streaming from the open parlour-door.

Totally forgetful at the instant of the presence of the corpse in the room,—so terribly excited and bewildered was he,—Mr. Torrens dragged Jeffreys into the parlour to demand the reason why he was up and dressed at that hour of the night—or rather morning—and it was not until he saw the man himself turn ghastly pale as his eyes encountered the hideous spectacle on the sofa, that Mr. Torrens remembered the frightful oversight which he had committed.

Then, hastening to close the room-door, which he locked also, Mr. Torrens said, "Why are you up? and wherefore were you prying about the house?"

The fact was that Jeffreys had expected a visit from some of Old Death's gang that night, and had never retired to bed at all. He heard the two double-knocks at the door—the first being that given by Rosamond, and the other by the baronet;—and when the robbers had quitted the house, closing the front-door after them, Jeffreys thought it must be the last visitor (whoever he might be) going away. After that the house had remained quiet for some little time; and Jeffreys fancied that Mr. Torrens had retired to bed. He had accordingly stolen down from his bed-room to unfasten a window shutter, and thus render the ingress of the expected robbers an easy matter: but perceiving a light in the parlour, he began to suspect that they must be already there. Accordingly he crept cautiously up to the door, and was for a moment stupefied when he obtained a glimpse of the reflection of his master's ghastly countenance in the mirror, a view of which he could command from the hall.

"Why are you up? and wherefore were you prying about the house?" demanded Mr. Torrens.

"The truth is, sir, I heard a noise, just now, and I was afraid that thieves was breaking in," was the ready reply: "so I got up and dressed; but, sir —"

And he glanced significantly towards the dead body.

"Jeffreys," said Mr. Torrens, in a hurried and excited tone, "a dreadful event has occurred to-night. This gentleman came to call upon me late—on very particular business—I left him here, while I went up stairs to speak to my daughter, who has returned home—and, on coming down stairs again, I saw two men escaping from the house. When I entered the parlour, a considerable sum of money, which I had left on the table, was gone—and my poor friend was as you now see him!"

The man-servant believed the tale; but he affected not to do so—for he was villain enough to rejoice at such an opportunity of getting his master completely in his power.

"You smile incredulously, John," said Mr. Torrens; "and yet I take heaven to witness —"

"It's orkard, sir—very orkard," observed Jeffreys; "and may be it 'll lead to scragging, if the stiff'un isn't put away."

Mr. Torrens shuddered from head to foot.

"What do you mean to do, sir?" asked Jeffreys.

"I am quite ready to assist you; but it's getting on for two o'clock —"

"Yes, I know it," interrupted Mr. Torrens.

am mad—I am driven to desperation! What would you advise? But will you be faithful? Will you keep the secret? I can reward you——”

“We’ll talk of that another time, sir,” said Jeffreys; “for the present let’s think of making away with the stiff’un. We must bury it. Stay here a moment, sir, while I go and get the stable lantern and a sack.”

“Or rather,” observed Mr. Torrens, “I will fetch some water to wash the carpet; fortunately, the blood has not trickled upon the sofa.”

Noiselessly the two crept away from the parlour—one to the stables, the other to the kitchen.

In a few minutes they met again by the side of the corpse, which they thrust into the sack; and between them the load was conveyed to the stable.

“You go and clean the carpet, sir,” said John Jeffreys, whose superior presence of mind served to invest him with authority to direct the proceedings; “while I dig a hole in the garden.”

Mr. Torrens hastened to obey the suggestion of his servant, and returned to the parlour, where he cleansed the carpet, as well as he could. He then took a bottle of Port-wine from the side-board, and broke it over the very spot where the blood had dripped down, leaving the fractured glass strewed about, and drawing the table near the sofa, so as to produce the appearance of the bottle having been accidentally knocked off it.

Nearly half an hour was consumed in this occupation; and Mr. Torrens, whose mind was already much relieved, hastened back to the garden, where Jeffreys was busily engaged in digging a grave for the murdered baronet. When the servant was tired, his master took a turn with the spade; and, as the soil was not particularly hard, an hour saw the completion of the labour.

The corpse was thrown into the hole, and the earth was shovelled over it—each layer being well stamped down by the feet.

When the task was accomplished, Mr. Torrens and Jeffreys re-entered the house; and, ere they separated to retire to their respective rooms, the former said, in a low whisper, “Once more I conjure you to maintain this secret inviolable, and I will find means to reward you well. For the present take this!”

And he slipped ten sovereigns—a portion of the murdered baronet’s money—into the hands of Jeffreys.

“Don’t be afraid that I’m leaky, sir,” responded the man, clutching the gold, and consigning it to his pocket, where he had already stowed away the baronet’s handsome repeater and gold rings—to which valuables he had helped himself, while his master was busily engaged in cleansing the carpet in the parlour;—for Mr. Torrens had merely plundered the corpse of the contents of the purse, and had not touched the jewellery, through fear that it might lead to the detection of the murder, if seen in his possession.

Master and man now separated—the former to seek a sleepless couch, and the latter to dream of the good fortune which that night’s adventure had brought him.

And in his unconsecrated grave—a victim to the assassin’s knife—slept the once gay, dissipated, and unprincipled Sir Henry Courtenay!

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE EARL OF ELLINGHAM AND LADY HATFIELD AGAIN.

It was about two o’clock, on the day following the incidents just related, that we shall find the Earl of Ellingham seated with Lady Georgiana Hatfield, in the drawing-room at the residence of the latter.

Arthur had returned on the preceding evening from France, accompanied by Mr. de Medina and Esther, after having seen Tom Rain, Tamar, and Jacob Smith embark at Havre-de-Grace for the United States.

Rainford and Tamar were united in the bonds of matrimony in Paris; and Mr. de Medina had insisted upon placing in the hands of his son-in-law a sum of ten thousand pounds, as a proof of his perfectly cordial feeling towards him, and of his determination, also, fully to recognise Tamar as his daughter again.

The Earl communicated all these incidents to Lady Hatfield, who listened to them with the greatest interest.

“I propose to introduce the Medinas to you shortly, Georgiana,” said the young nobleman. “You will find the father a person of very gentlemanly manners, well read, and particularly agreeable in conversation; while his daughter, Miss Esther, is as amiable and accomplished as the child of such a man should be.”

“Arthur,” replied Lady Hatfield—for they now addressed each other in the same friendly, or rather familiar manner, when alone together, as if they were brother and sister—“I would rather not form the acquaintance of your friends for the present.”

The Earl appeared surprised and vexed.

“Georgiana,” he exclaimed, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, “is it possible that you entertain any of those ridiculous prejudices* which only very

* We have been much gratified by observing that our attempt to vindicate the Jews against most of the unjust charges which it seems to be a traditional fashion to level against them, has not passed unnoticed. All the Jewish papers have quoted the exculpatory passage at page 172 of this Series of “THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON:” many provincial journals have also transferred it to their columns; and in No. 173 of *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* (New Series) it was printed, with the following record of approval on the part of the Editors of that well-conducted periodical:—“We cordially agree in this manly defence of a cruelly misrepresented people.”

In this enlightened age it is really horrible to think that the most abominable prejudices should prevail amongst Christians against the Jews. England boasts her high state of civilisation; and yet the Jews labour under innumerable disabilities, which have been abolished in France. After all, the French understand what civilisation really is much better than the English. The idea of a Jew sitting in the House of Commons would send all the Church party raving mad; but in France there are many Jews in the Chamber of Deputies. The learned Selden said very justly, “Talk what you will of the Jews, that they are cursed, they thrive wherever they come; they are able to oblige the prince of their country (and others too) by lending him money; none of them beg; they keep together, and for their being hated, my life for your’s! Christians hate one another as much.”

The worst feature in the malignant persecution and misrepresentation of the Jews, is that the evil prejudice against them has been, and still is, fostered by Christian Divines and Theological writers. A Spanish theologian

ignorant or very narrow-minded persons can possibly entertain towards a most estimable race?"

"Oh! no—no," cried Lady Hatfield emphatically. "I have read much concerning the Jews, and I feel convinced that they are most unjustly treated by Christians. Heaven knows, Arthur, that I have no bad prejudices of that nature; and were I imbued with them, I would never rest till I had stifled such evidences of an illiberal and narrowed mind."

"I am delighted to hear you thus express yourself," said the Earl. "During my sojourn in France with the Medina family, I have obtained a great insight into the Jewish character; and I am convinced that it is fully as benevolent, as generous, and as liberal as that of the Christian. But we were speaking of my proposed presentation of Mr. de Medina and his daughter Esther to you. From all that I have said to them concerning you, they are most anxious to form your acquaintance; and you have yet to explain to me the meaning of your observation that you would rather postpone the introduction."

"To justify myself," returned Georgiana, blushing, "against your suspicion that I entertain illiberal prejudices, Arthur, I will frankly state my motives for expressing that wish. Indeed, I know not why any consideration should induce me to retain those motives a secret—especially as the explanation of them will afford me an opportunity to

give you my advice. For have we not agreed to be unto each other as brother and sister?—and in what can a sister more conscientiously advise her brother than in matters regarding his happiness?"

"My happiness!" exclaimed the Earl, starting slightly, and evincing some degree of astonishment at Lady Hatfield's remark.

"Yes, Arthur—your happiness!" repeated Georgiana, with difficulty suppressing a sigh. "Now, listen to me attentively. I have heard that Miss Esther de Medina is eminently beautiful—excessively accomplished—very amiable—and endowed with every qualification to render her worthy of becoming even a monarch's bride."

"Georgiana!" cried the Earl of Ellingham, his heart fluttering with mingled suspense, surprise, and joy.

"Yes," observed Lady Hatfield; "and since you have learnt," she added more slowly, and in a softly plaintive tone—though she endeavoured to subdue the emotion which so modulated her voice,—“since you have learnt that *our* union is impossible, Arthur,—since you have ceased to look upon me otherwise than as a sister,—it is probable—nay, it is both natural and certain that you cannot have beheld Esther de Medina with indifference."

"Georgiana," exclaimed Arthur, in a solemn tone, "I never can forget that my first love was devoted to you; and—although circumstances have, alas! prevented our union—yet I should be unwilling to promise to another that heart which I so freely—so gladly gave to you!"

"It is alike unjust and ridiculous for me to suppose that, as I cannot become your wife, Arthur, you may never marry. No," continued Lady Hatfield; "I should despise myself, were I to entertain such abhorrent selfishness. My ardent desire is to know that you are happy; and Esther de Medina is well qualified to ensure your felicity. Nay—interrupt me not: remember, it is now a sister who counsels a brother! Granting even that you could never love another as you have loved me—and this is a supposition which I have not vanity enough to entertain for a moment—but, even granting it, for argument's sake, you may yet treat a beautiful and affectionate wife with that tenderness—those delicate attentions—and that cherishing kindness which will make *her* happy. Oh! believe me, such a state of bliss would soon beget love in your heart,—a love for Esther as ardent and sincere as that with which you honoured me; for it is the mere idle theory of romance-writers, that the same heart cannot love twice. Nature herself proclaims the falsehood of the doctrine; and the experience of all wise legislators, whether secular or ecclesiastic, declares the same, by the mere fact of allowing second marriages. Believe me, Arthur, I am speaking solely in regard to your happiness; and the day shall come when your lips breathe the words, '*Georgiana, I thank thee for the counsel thou gavest me.*'"

The Earl surveyed with respectful admiration that noble-hearted woman who thus stifled her own feelings through generous solicitude for his felicity.

"And now," she resumed, after a moment's pause, "you can divine the reasons which induced me to express a wish that my introduction to the Medinas should be postponed for the present. I am but a weak woman;—and though I can proudly say that no petty feeling of jealousy would ever enter my heart—yet I would rather not awaken in my mind

has placed on record the following infamous specimen of malignity:—

"The tribe of Judah treacherously delivered up our Lord, and thirty of them die by treason every year.

"The tribe of Reuben seized our Lord in the garden, and therefore the curse of barrenness is on all they sow or plant, and no green thing can flourish over their graves.

"The tribe of Gad put on the crown of thorns, and on every 25th of March their bodies are covered with blood from deep and painful wounds.

"Those of Asher buffeted Jesus, and their right hands are always nearly a palm shorter than the left.

"Those of Naphtali jested with Christ about a herd of swine, since when they are all born with tusks like wild boars.

"The tribe of Manasseh cried out, 'His blood be on us and on our children,' and at every new moon they are tormented by bloody sores.

"The tribe of Simeon nailed our Lord to the cross, and on the 25th of March, four deep and dreadful wounds are inflicted on their hands and feet.

"Those of Levi spat on the Saviour, and the wind always blows back their saliva in their faces, so that they are habitually covered with filth.

"The tribe of Issachar scourged Christ, and on the 25th of March blood streams forth from their shoulders.

"The tribe of Zebulon cast lots for the garments, and on the same day the roof of their mouth is tortured by deep wounds.

"The tribe of Joseph made the nails for crucifying Jesus, and blunted them to increase his sufferings; and therefore their hands and feet are covered with gashes and blood.

"Those of Benjamin gave vinegar to Jesus; they all squint and are palsied, and have their mouths filled with little nauseous worms, which, in truth (adds our author), is the case with all Jewish women after the age of 25, because it was a woman who entreated the tribe of Joseph not to sharpen the nails used for the crucifixion of our Lord."

That wretchedly prejudiced and unprincipled writer, Justin Martyr, wrote as follows, while apostrophising the Jews:—

"God promised that you should be as the sand on the sea shore; and so you are indeed, in more senses than one. You are as numerous, and you are as barren, and incapable of producing any thing good."



painful recollections of *what might have been*, by beholding you in the society of one to whom you would be engaged. Moreover, as Miss de Medina has doubtless heard that *our union* was once resolved upon," added Lady Hatfield, now unable to suppress a profound sigh, "it would not be agreeable for her to visit me, if she accept you as her husband, until after your marriage. Those are my motives, Arthur—and now you will admit that, so far from entertaining any illiberal prejudices against the Jews, I have proved the very contrary, by earnestly recommending you to espouse an amiable and beautiful lady belonging to that nation."

"Dearest sister—for such indeed you are to me," said the Earl of Ellingham, "I appreciate all the excellence of your intentions in thus advising me; and I will frankly admit to you, that did I now think of uniting my fate with any woman, Esther de Medina would be the object of my choice, since my alliance with yourself has been rendered impossible. But I am not quite prepared to take that step—nor do I even know whether Miss de Medina would accept my suit, were I to proffer it."

"If her affections were not engaged before she saw you—before she knew so much of you," ex-

claimed Georgiana, "she loves you now. Oh! of this I am convinced," she continued enthusiastically. "Consider how much you have done to render her grateful to you; and gratitude in woman is the parent of affection! You have saved her beloved sister Tamar from the depths of despair by adopting those wondrous schemes, by which he who is now her husband, was snatched from the jaws of death;—you reconciled a father to a long discarded daughter;—and you have at length seen that daughter made a wife—the wife of the man she adores! Oh! Arthur, think you not that Esther ponders on all this? Yes—and, in the gratitude of her generous soul, she already sees a god-like being in the Earl of Ellingham."

"You will render me quite vain, Georgiana," said the young nobleman; "for you are magnifying into glorious achievements a few very common-place acts on my part."

"I am giving you your due for all that is great and noble in your disposition—all that is excellent and estimable in your character," replied Lady Hatfield, in a tone of fervent sincerity. "And that you are every thing I describe is so much the more to your credit, inasmuch as you belong to a class not

this appalling conviction throw me. And yet I was compelled to veil my grief as much as possible;—for at that time a suspicion of my condition on the part of the world, would have driven me to suicide. I need not—I could not enter into the details of the plan which I had adopted to conceal my dishonour. Suffice it to say, that I succeeded in so doing—and, in a small retired village, and under a feigned name, did I give birth to a son. To Sarah Watts was the babe confided,—and, for a sum of money paid down at once, she agreed to adopt it as her own. By an accident she discovered who I was—my name was on an article of jewellery which I had with me. But she promised the strictest secrecy, and I put faith in her words. Oh! do not blame me, if I acted as I have now described—if I abandoned that child whose presence near me would only have been a proof of my dishonour, and a constant memorial of the dread outrage which no levity—no encouragement—no fault on my part had provoked!”

“Blame you, Georgiana!” exclaimed the Earl, approaching and taking her hand kindly;—“how could I blame you? You acted as prudence dictated—and, indeed, as circumstances inevitably compelled you. But—now that the parentage of this child is at length discovered—how do you wish me to act? Remember, Georgiana, every thing in this respect shall be managed solely with regard to your wishes—solely according to your directions. Shall I communicate in a letter to my half-brother the secret which has thus strangely transpired this day?—or shall I leave him in ignorance of the fact that he has adopted his own son?”

“He knew not that the outrage he perpetrated led to that consequence,” said Lady Hatfield, now cruelly bewildered and uncertain how to decide. “No—he could not even suspect it—for I never met him again until that night on the Hounslow road—and even then I recognised him not—and it was only at the police-office in Bow Street that I again beheld him who had been my ruin!”

“I am convinced,” observed the Earl, “that Rainford has not the least suspicion that you indeed became a mother. And, oh! when I touched upon the subject of his atrocious behaviour towards you—while we were in Paris—had you seen the tears of contrition—heart-felt contrition which he shed—But, no,” added the Earl, suddenly interrupting himself,—“it were impossible that you could forgive him!”

“I forgive him for *your* sake, Arthur,” said Georgiana, in a mild but firm tone. “And now, relative to that child—yes—he shall know that he is with his father; and your brother must be informed that he has adopted his own son! Providence indeed seems to have so willed it; for we cannot believe that accident alone threw the child thus wondrously into the way of the author of its being. Arthur,” she added, taking the young nobleman’s hand,—“you will write to Rainford—and you will tell him all. It is not necessary to enjoin him to treat the child with kindness—for you say that his disposition is naturally generous. Nevertheless—I should wish,” continued the lady, looking down as she uttered these words, and sinking her voice almost to a whisper—for *maternal feelings* were stirring within her bosom,—“nevertheless, I should wish that you impress upon the mind of your half-brother the necessity of bringing that child up in the paths of virtue and honour.”

“Your wishes shall be complied with,” answered the Earl. “But fear not that Rainford would inculcate evil principles into the mind of his son. No—he is thoroughly changed, and will become a good, and, I hope, a happy and prosperous man.”

The young nobleman then took leave of Lady Hatfield, whom he left a prey to emotions of a very painful nature.

For deeply and tenderly did she love Arthur; and great violence did she to her feelings when she so generously and conscientiously counselled him to take the beautiful Jewess as his wife!

And as the Earl returned home to his mansion in Pall Mall, to pen a letter to Rainford, who was then on his voyage, under an assumed name, and accompanied by Tamar, Jacob Smith, and little Charley, to the United States,—he reviewed all the details of that long and interesting conversation which had that afternoon passed between Lady Hatfield and himself;—and he found that the tendency thereof was to make him ponder more seriously and more intently upon the image of the charming Esther than he ever yet had done.

CHAPTER LXXX.

MRS. SLINGSBY AND MR. TORRENS.

WHILE the scene, related in the preceding chapter, was taking place at the residence of Lady Hatfield, in Piccadilly, incidents requiring mention occurred elsewhere.

Mrs. Slingsby was seated in her drawing-room, a prey to the most frightful alarms.

Sir Henry Courtenay had left her the evening before to acquaint Mr. Torrens with Rosamond’s flight, and consult with him relative to the necessary steps to be taken to prevent the exposure which himself and Mrs. Slingsby so much dreaded. On thus parting with her, the baronet had faithfully promised to call early in the morning and inform her of the particulars of his interview with Mr. Torrens;—but it was now past one o’clock in the afternoon, and he had not made his appearance.

What could his absence mean?—had any thing disagreeable occurred?—was it possible that Rosamond could have made away with herself, and that Sir Henry had taken to flight through dread of an exposure and its consequences?

The suspense which Mrs. Slingsby endured, was horrible—horrible!

Guilty consciences invariably magnify into giants even the most dwarf-like causes of apprehension; and there was no exception to this rule on the present occasion.

A hundred times had she glanced at the elegant or-molu clock on the mantel—and as hour after hour passed, and he came not, her restlessness increased to such a degree that it at length reached a state of nervous excitement no longer endurable.

She accordingly hurried to her chamber, dressed herself in her walking-attire, and having left word with her servants that in case Sir Henry Courtenay should call, he was to be requested to wait until her return, sped to the nearest hackney-coach stand, where, stepping into a vehicle, she ordered the driver to take her over to Torrens Cottage.

Yes—thither she was determined to proceed with—

out delay, even at the risk of encountering Rosamond; though she could scarcely believe that the wronged girl had returned home. For, not precisely remembering all the details of the conversation which took place between herself and the baronet, and which Rosamond had overheard, the guilty woman imagined that something more than mere allusions might have been made to the connivance of Mr. Torrens in the ruin of his daughter; and hence Mrs. Slingsby's very natural supposition that the victim of the infernal plot had not returned to the parental dwelling.

The coach did not proceed with particular celerity, and the distance from the West End to Torrens Cottage was great:—Mrs. Slingsby had therefore ample leisure to continue her harrowing meditations upon the real or supposed dangers which menaced her.

In sooth, her position was by no means an enviable one—unless indeed a convict under sentence of death might have preferred her state to that of imminent and ignominious death. For circumstances appeared suddenly to combine against her. She was in the family-way—and this was alone sufficient to cause her the most serious chagrin, especially as her impious scheme of proclaiming herself a second Johanna Southcott had been so completely frustrated by the determined opposition of her paramour. Then there was the affair of Rosamond Torrens, one word from whose lips would have the effect of tearing away the mask of hypocrisy which Mrs. Slingsby had so long worn, and exposing her to the world in all the hideous nudity of her criminal character. Lastly, the unaccountable absence of the baronet filled her mind with the most serious misgivings; for she knew that if he had indeed absconded, and if he should cease to maintain her in a pecuniary sense, her position would become lamentable in the extreme.

All these maddening reflections raised a storm of agitation in her guilty mind; and she could scarcely subdue her excitement so that it should escape the notice of the coachman, as he opened the door of the vehicle when it stopped opposite Torrens Cottage.

Mr. Torrens was at home; and Mrs. Slingsby was immediately conducted by Jeffreys to the parlour—the very parlour where her paramour had been murdered on the preceding evening!

Rosamond, from her bed-room window, had observed the arrival of the hateful woman, and was lost in surprise at her conduct in daring to visit her father's abode.

Mr. Torrens received Mrs. Slingsby in the apartment where, as we have just stated, the awful tragedy of the previous night had been enacted; and this was the first time the criminal pair had ever met.

Bad as Mr. Torrens himself was, he could not help feeling a sentiment of extreme loathing and disgust for the woman who concealed so black a heart beneath the garb of religious hypocrisy;—and, though he endeavoured to speak politely to her as he desired her to be seated, his manner was cold, reserved, and indicative of the influence which her presence produced upon him.

"We know each other by name, Mr. Torrens," began Mrs. Slingsby; "but it is only now that we have met. You can doubtless conjecture the object of my visit—"

"Yes, madam," exclaimed Rosamond, suddenly bursting into the room, evidently in a state of fear-

ful excitement: then, hastily closing the door, she added, "My father can too well divine the purport of this insolent intrusion. You doubtless seek to recover possession of me—to take me back to your infamous abode—to surrender me up to your own vile paramour! Oh! my dear father, surely—surely you will not allow this polluted creature to remain beneath your roof a minute longer!"

"Rosamond—Rosamond," said Mrs. Slingsby, becoming the colour of scarlet, "you will regret those harsh words. I came for the purpose of giving certain explanations to your respected parent—"

"Explanations, madam!" cried the young girl, with a bitter smile of contempt. "What explanations can *you* offer which *I* have not already given?"

"I have every reason to believe that you overheard a conversation between Sir Henry Courtenay and myself," said Mrs. Slingsby, growing bolder as she perceived that the atrocious complicity of Mr. Torrens was not suspected by his daughter; "and that conversation seems to have alarmed you—for your flight from the house was wild and precipitate."

"Had I not already tarried there too long?" demanded Rosamond emphatically. "Oh! think not to be able to delude me any more with your specious misrepresentations—your disgusting sophistry! A veil has fallen from my eyes—and I now behold *you*, madam, and that baronet whom you so much vaunted, in your proper colours."

"You are wrong thus to suspect us so cruelly," said Mrs. Slingsby. "The conversation which you overheard was but the repetition of another conversation which Sir Henry Courtenay had himself overheard between two persons whom you know not, and which he was relating to me. But I appeal to your father whether *he* believes me—"

"Enough, madam!" exclaimed Rosamond, in a tone which convinced the base woman that she was indeed no longer to be imposed upon. "My father knows you to be a degraded hypocrite—and your insolence is extreme in thus daring to violate the sanctity of the paternal dwelling to which I have been forced to return for shelter and refuge. And were it not," she added bitterly, "that I should be proclaiming my own dishonour, not a moment's hesitation would I manifest in tearing away the mask from your face, and exposing you to the world. Oh! when I think of all the insidious wiles which you have practised—all the abhorrent tutoring which you have brought to play upon my mind, I deplore—yes, deeply do I deplore that necessity which compels me to place a seal upon my lips!"

Mrs. Slingsby had heard enough to satisfy her that no exposure would take place at the hands of Rosamond; and she was not very solicitous to prolong her visit. The cause of the baronet's absence she had yet to learn; but she concluded that it was not at Torrens Cottage she must seek to have her curiosity in that respect gratified.

She accordingly rose—bowed to Mr. Torrens, who had remained a mute but most alarmed spectator of the whole scene—and hastily withdrew, just in time to avoid coming in collision with John Jeffreys; for that worthy, judging by the excited manner in which he, himself unobserved, had seen Rosamond rush into the parlour, that something extraordinary was connected with the arrival of

Mrs. Slingsby, had very coolly and quietly listened at the parlour-door to every word that was uttered within.

Mrs. Slingsby returned home, somewhat consoled by the conviction that her character was safe from any vindictiveness on the part of Rosamond: but she was still alarmed in respect to the baronet;—and this fear increased greatly, when, on her arrival in Old Burlington Street, at about four o'clock, she learnt that he had not called.

She immediately despatched a note to his residence; but the domestic returned with the answer that Sir Henry Courtenay had not been home since the preceding day—a circumstance which caused no small degree of alarm in the baronet's household, inasmuch as though he often slept away from his abode, his servants were invariably kept ignorant of those proofs of irregularities on his part. In a word, he was accustomed so to arrange matters, that his nocturnal outings were never suspected at his own residence—and thus his absence on this occasion had naturally inspired some degree of apprehension.

Mrs. Slingsby was astounded at the message which her servant had brought back. She could not even hazard a conjecture relative to the cause of Sir Henry Courtenay's disappearance; and she was at a loss where to search for him.

She therefore resolved to remain at home in the hope that he would presently call upon her, but time passed—and still he came not.

At length there was a loud double knock at the door, and she fancied it was the announcement of Sir Henry's arrival. But, instead of the object of her anxiety, Mr. Torrens was ushered into the drawing-room.

"I fancied, madam," he said, "that you had some particular reason in calling upon me just now, and which the presence of the unfortunate Rosamond prevented you from explaining. I therefore lost no time in waiting upon you."

"My alarm was somewhat appeased by the words which fell from your daughter's lips," answered Mrs. Slingsby, motioning to her visitor to be seated; "inasmuch as she expressed her intention of remaining silent on a subject which neither I nor you would wish to become a matter of public gossip. But I am astonished and grieved at the behaviour of Sir Henry Courtenay, who left me last night with the intention of proceeding direct to your house, and whom I have not since seen."

"He came not to me, madam," answered Mr. Torrens, with an unblushing countenance.

"This is most extraordinary—most alarming!" cried Mrs. Slingsby; "for he has not been home all night—nor yet to-day—and I begin to have vague suspicions that something wrong must have occurred."

"Sir Henry Courtenay is a gallant man—"

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby hastily, as if the subject were not a very agreeable one: "but he also maintains a character for propriety and good conduct—and his dependants are never suffered to know that he stays away from home at night. You see that I am compelled to be candid with you—for the affair is most serious. Now, only reflect for a moment, Mr. Torrens, upon what my state of mind would be, were I questioned relative to Sir Henry's disappearance. Suppose, I say, that he did not soon come back—that he continued to be

missing,—it would transpire that he was with me until late last evening—that we went out together,—for we *did* go out, to search for Rosamond,—and that I came back alone."

"No one could suspect *you*, madam, of having made away with him," observed Mr. Torrens.

"No—but I should be overwhelmed with the most embarrassing questions," exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby hastily. "And, do you know, that remark of your's has inspired me with horror and alarm? No one would suspect *me* of having made away with him! Of course not:—how could a weak woman assassinate a man in the streets of London, and not leave a trace of the dreadful deed behind? But might not inquiries be made—might it not be discovered that Sir Henry and myself were frequent visitors—I must speak candidly to you—to a house of ill-fame? And then—oh then! what a dreadful exposure would take place!"

"You are torturing yourself with vain apprehensions, Mrs. Slingsby," said Mr. Torrens, experiencing the greatest difficulty to conceal his own agitation.

"I should have thought that *you*, Mr. Torrens, would have assisted me with your advice—considering how we have been involved in the same transaction—rather than treat my fears with levity," said Mrs. Slingsby, in an excited manner. "And, if I tell you the candid truth," she added, fixing her eyes upon his countenance in a way which seemed intended to read the inmost secrets of his soul, "I must declare my conviction that *you* know more of the cause of the baronet's disappearance than you choose to admit."

"I—madam!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens, shrinking from the accusation in spite of himself.

"Yes—*you*," returned the lady, growing more and more excited: "and that suspicion which I hazarded, I scarcely know why, is now confirmed by your manner. I again say, yes—you know more of the cause of Sir Henry Courtenay's disappearance than you are willing to admit. I am convinced that he *did* visit you last night—and if he never came back, what account will you give?—what explanation will you render? Your anxiety in coming after me just now,—the singularity of your remark that no one would suspect *me* of foul play towards the baronet,—and your trepidation when I named the suspicion which had flashed to my mind concerning you,—all these circumstances convince me that you are no stranger to the cause of Sir Henry Courtenay's disappearance."

"Madam—this outrageous charge—implying a crime of which I am utterly incapable—" began Mr. Torrens, scarcely knowing how to meet the accusation, and seriously inclined to divulge the whole truth.

"I do not say that you have murdered Sir Henry Courtenay," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby, speaking in a low tone, and giving a strong, hollow emphasis to that dreadful word which few can breathe without a shudder: "but that some quarrel may have taken place between you—that you were compelled to appear violent and vindictive in respect to him, your daughter perhaps being present—and that all this led to a fatal issue, are things which now seem to form a complete and connected train of horrible impressions in my mind. At all events, Mr. Torrens," she added, sinking her voice to a low whisper, "be candid with me—tell me the whole truth—and we

will consult together, circumstances having already rendered us colleagues in one transaction."

"I have nothing to tell you, Mrs. Slingsby, in respect to this business," said Mr. Torrens; "and I am as astonished at Sir Henry Courtenay's disappearance as yourself."

"Then, if I were questioned," observed the lady, "you would have no objection to my saying that I parted last night from Sir Henry Courtenay near St. James's Church, Piccadilly, his last words being to the effect that he was about to call at Torrens Cottage on particular business?"

As she thus spoke, Mrs. Slingsby fixed her eyes in a searching—nay, a piercing manner upon the countenance of her companion, who for a moment quailed and betrayed evident signs of the desperate efforts he was making to conceal his agitation.

"Yes—you may safely say *that*, if you perceive any utility in so doing," returned Mr. Torrens at length: then, his features suddenly assuming a ferocious expression, he added, "But why proclaim war against me! Do we not know too much of each other to render such a warfare safe or useful to either? Were you not the paramour of Sir Henry Courtenay?—did you yourself not admit ere now that you visited a house of ill-fame with him?—and are you not at this moment with child by him? Woman—woman," muttered Torrens between his teeth, "provoke me not,—or it shall be war indeed—war to the knife!"

"Be reasonable, sir," said Mrs. Slingsby, now assuming a cold and resolute air; "and let us talk as two accomplices ought to converse—and not with menaces and threats."

"Agreed, madam—but be you reasonable also," returned Mr. Torrens.

"Then wherefore keep anything secret from me?" demanded Mrs. Slingsby. "I have read the truth—have divined it—and your language has just confirmed my impression. But think not that I care for Sir Henry Courtenay, as a loving mistress or wife might care for him. No," she added contemptuously: "any affection which I may ever have experienced towards him, has long since vanished."

"And of what avail would it be to you to know that Sir Henry Courtenay was no more, even for a moment granting that he indeed exists no longer?" asked Torrens.

"I will tell you," replied Mrs. Slingsby in a low and hoarse whisper, while she looked intently and in a manner full of dark meaning into her companion's eyes, as she bent her countenance towards him. "If I were assured that Sir Henry Courtenay was indeed no more, I would become possessed of two thousand pounds by ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens, his mind instantly conceiving the idea of sharing the produce of whatever plan the lady might adopt to accomplish her purpose—for we have already said that his necessities were still great, and that, unless he shortly obtained funds, he would be as badly off as he was ere he sold the virtue of his daughter.

"Yes," resumed Mrs. Slingsby; "and to show you that I have more confidence in you than you have in me, I will give you a full and complete explanation. Sir Henry Courtenay promised me two thousand pounds as a reward for my connivance in the plan respecting Rosamond."

"Go on—go on," said Mr. Torrens hastily.

"That reward I have not received, because the payments which Sir Henry had to make to you, and other claims upon him, had caused him to overdraw his bankers. But yesterday morning he paid in eight thousand pounds; and he intimated to one of the partners that he should give me a cheque for two thousand in the course of the afternoon. The fact is," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "those bankers believe that I have property in India, which Sir Henry Courtenay's agent there manages for me, and that the proceeds therefore pass through Sir Henry's hands. This tale was invented to account for the numerous and large cheques which I have received from the baronet on that bank:—it was the saving clause for my reputation. Now, those two thousand pounds which were promised me I can have for little trouble and a small risk."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Torrens, becoming more and more interested in this explanation.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "and I will tell you how almost immediately. But I must first observe that I should have received the cheque last evening had not the sudden flight of Rosamond interrupted the discourse which I was having with the baronet, and thrown us into confusion. But,"—and again she lowered her voice to an almost inaudible whisper—"I can imitate the handwriting of Sir Henry Courtenay to such a degree that it would defy detection. Now, do you understand me?"

"I do—I do," answered Mr. Torrens.

"And you perceive that I have full confidence in you," added the widow.

Mr. Torrens rose and paced the room for a few minutes. He was deliberating within himself whether he should repose an equal trust in Mrs. Slingsby; and he decided upon doing so. She saw what was passing in his mind, and remained silent, confident as to the result.

"My dear madam," he said, resuming his seat, "I will at once admit to you that Sir Henry Courtenay is indeed no more."

The lady heard him with breathless attention; for though she was fully prepared for the avowal, yet when it came it sounded so awfully—so ominously, that she received it with emotions of terror and dismay.

"It is indeed too true," continued Torrens: "but think not for a moment that I am a murderer! No—no; bad as I may be—as I know myself to be, in fine—I could not perpetrate such a deed as that. A strange and wonderful combination of circumstances led to the shocking catastrophe. Listen—and I will tell you all."

Mr. Torrens then related every incident of the preceding evening, suppressing only that portion of the tale which involved the fact of his servant John Jeffreys being acquainted with the occurrence, and having lent his aid in disposing of the body. This circumstance he concealed through that inherent aversion which man ever has to confess that he is in the power of any one; and he made it appear, by his own story, that, unassisted, he had buried the corpse.

At first Mrs. Slingsby was incredulous relative to the version of the murder which she heard. She thought that Torrens was himself the perpetrator of the act; but when he declared how cruelly the robbery of his money had embarrassed him, and when she reflected that there really could have

been no reason urgent or strong enough to induce him to make away with the baronet, she ended by fully believing his narrative.

"Then he is indeed no more!" she exclaimed.

"But, my God! what will be thought of his disappearance?—and will not those enquiries, which I so much dread, be made?"

"As no suspicion can possibly fall upon either yourself or me," responded Mr. Torrens, "it is far from likely that any such enquiries will be instituted. No—you need not be alarmed on that head, my dear madam. I should rather be inclined to entertain apprehensions for the success of your own scheme of—the forgery," he added, after a moment's pause.

"No danger can possibly attend that undertaking," said Mrs. Slingsby. "The baronet stated at the bankers' that he should give me the cheque yesterday; and it will be paid in a moment, even if they have already heard of his disappearance, which is scarcely probable, because the fears excited by that fact have not as yet become so strong as to lead to the suspicion that he has indeed met with foul play."

"You are, then, confident of being enabled to counterfeit his handwriting successfully?" asked Mr. Torrens.

"Beyond all possibility of doubt," replied the widow.

"And shall you want my assistance?" inquired Torrens, thinking how he could start a pretext for claiming a portion of the expected proceeds of the nefarious plan.

"Listen to me," said Mrs. Slingsby, after a few moments' deliberation, and now speaking as if she had finally come to a settled resolution on a particular point, which she had been revolving in her mind almost ever since Mr. Torrens entered the room: "I have something to propose to you which regards us both, and which may suit yourself as well as it would suit me. You are involved in embarrassments?"

"I am indeed," replied Mr. Torrens, now awaiting in breathless suspense the coming explanation, which, by the leading question just put, appeared to relate to some scheme for relieving him of his difficulties.

"And those embarrassments are very serious?" continued the widow.

"So serious that they are insurmountable, as far as I can see at present," was the response.

"Then you fear executions—arrest—prison—and all the usual ordeal of an insolvent debtor?" asked the lady.

"Just so: and sooner than enter on that ordeal, I would commit suicide," rejoined Mr. Torrens.

"The alternative I have to propose to you is not quite so serious nor alarming as that," resumed Mrs. Slingsby. "I have shown you that I can put myself in possession of two thousand pounds to-morrow morning: will that sum relieve you completely from your difficulties?"

"And enable me to carry out those speculations which must produce a large fortune," answered Torrens.

"Then those two thousand pounds are at your disposal, on one condition," said Mrs. Slingsby.

"And that condition?" gasped Mr. Torrens, in mingled joy and suspense.

"Is that you marry me," returned Mrs. Slingsby, as calmly as if she were making a bargain of a very ordinary nature.

"Marry you!" exclaimed her companion, quite unprepared for this proposal.

"Yes—marry me," repeated the widow. "You want money to save you from ruin—I want a husband to screen me from disgrace. You are involved in pecuniary troubles—I am in a way to become a mother. I can save your person from a gaol—you can save my character from dishonour."

"The arrangement is indeed an equitable one," said Mr. Torrens, not without the least scintillation of satire in his remark: "but I see one fatal objection."

"And that is your daughter Rosamond," observed Mrs. Slingsby. "Surely the whim—the aversion—or the phantasy of a girl will not induce you to reject a proposal which will save you from ruin and imprisonment?"

"And yet, what could I say to her? how could I explain my conduct? what would she think, after all she knows of you?" demanded Mr. Torrens.

"She has not the power to prevent the match; and that is the principal point in the matter," returned Mrs. Slingsby coolly. "You may as well urge as an objection that Clarence Villiers, my nephew, is your son-in-law; but I am not so foolish as to be alarmed at such scruples, and you must have seen too much of the world to allow yourself to be irretrievably ruined for the sake of a few idle punctilios. Give me your decision at once—aye or nay. If it be the former, the marriage may be celebrated by special license to-morrow evening; if it be the latter, there is at once an end of the business, and we need not be the less good friends."

"You regard the whole proposition, then, entirely as a matter of business," said Mr. Torrens. "Well—that is indeed the way to look at it. Of course, if we strike a bargain and unite our fortunes, we shall require only one establishment. Will you break up this in Old Burlington Street, and be contented to dwell at my Cottage?"

"Certainly," was the reply. "The sale of my furniture will pay my debts, and perhaps leave a surplus: at all events we shall have the two thousand pounds clear."

"And that sum you will place in my hands to-morrow morning?" said Mr. Torrens interrogatively.

"No—to-morrow evening, after the ceremony," responded the widow.

"Then we cannot trust each other?" continued Mr. Torrens.

"I think we should act prudently to adopt as many mutual precautions as possible," observed Mrs. Slingsby coolly.

"Granted!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens. "And what guarantee have I that, when once the indissoluble knot shall have been tied, you will hand me over the promised sum?"

"Simply the fact that I do not wish to marry a man who will be the next morning conveyed away to a prison."

"That is a mere assertion, and no security," remonstrated Mr. Torrens; "we are talking the matter over in a purely business-like sense. Now, as far as I can see, the advantages will be all on your side. If you happen to be in debt, you will have a husband on whose person your creditors will pounce instead of on your own; and, at all events, as you are with child, you will have a person whom you can represent as the legitimate father of the expected offspring."

"I will tell you how the business can be managed," said Mrs. Slingsby, after a pause. "A thought has struck me! I will lodge the money in the hands of a very respectable solicitor whom I know, and you can accompany me to his office for the purpose. In his keeping shall it remain, with the understanding that it is to be paid to you on your becoming my husband."

"Good!" observed Mr. Torrens. "Who is the solicitor?"

"Mr. Howard," was the answer.

"I know him, and have no objection to him as the agent in the business. I think we have now got over all obstacles in that respect. A difficult task will it however prove to me to prepare my daughter this evening for the step which I am to take to-morrow."

"Oh! I have no doubt you will succeed," said Mrs. Slingsby; "it would be indeed hard if a father could not overcome, with his reasoning, the objections of his own child."

"I must do my best," observed Torrens, rising. "At what hour to-morrow shall I call to accompany you to the lawyer's?"

"At about twelve. I shall go to the bank between ten and eleven; and you can in the meantime obtain the marriage-license."

"It shall be done," returned Mr. Torrens. "The ceremony will be performed here?" he added interrogatively.

"Yes—at seven o'clock in the evening. I will make arrangements with two ladies whom I know, to be bridesmaids, and Dr. Wagtail will give me away. After the ceremony we will repair to Torrens Cottage."

Thus, calmly and deliberately, was settled the solemn covenant between the man who had sold his daughter's virtue and the licentious woman who was now prepared to commit a forgery!

And the worthy pair separated, Mr. Torrens having embraced his intended wife, because he considered a kiss to be as it were the seal of the bargain just concluded, and also because Mrs. Slingsby by her manner appeared to invite the salutation.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

ROSAMOND AT HOME.

WE shall follow Mr. Torrens homeward, and see how he acquitted himself of the disagreeable and difficult task of breaking his matrimonial intentions to his daughter, the fair but ruined Rosamond.

It was past nine o'clock in the evening when he reached the cottage; and Rosamond, with a charming filial solicitude to render her parent's home as comfortable as possible, had superintended the preparations for supper. Exercising a command, too, over the sad feelings which filled her bosom, and invoking resignation with Christian fortitude to her aid, she even manifested a species of cheerfulness as she opened the front-door at the sound of his well-known knock. But, alas! it was not the innocent—artless cheerfulness of other days:—it was merely the struggle of the moon-beam to pierce the mass of dark and menacing clouds!

And now behold the father and daughter seated at the supper-table—that repast which the care of

Rosamond had endeavoured to render as agreeable as possible, but which was disposed of hastily and without appetite on either side.

At length, when the things were cleared away and Mr. Torrens had fortified his courage with sundry glasses of wine, he prepared to enter on the grave and important subject which occupied his mind.

"Rosamond, my love," he said, speaking in as kind a tone as it was possible for his nature to assume, "I have something to communicate to you, and shall be glad if you will hear me calmly and without excitement. I have this evening seen Mrs. Slingsby."

"That woman!" exclaimed the daughter, starting. "Oh! I had hoped that her name would no more be mentioned in this house."

"I begged of you not to give way to excitement—I warned you to be reasonable," said Mr. Torrens severely. "Surely you can accord me your attention when I am anxious to discourse with you on matters of importance?"

"Pardon me, dearest father—and, oh! do not blame nor reproach me if I manifest a very natural irritability—a loathing—an abhorrence—"

She could say no more, but burst into a flood of tears.

Mr. Torrens suffered her to give full vent to her emotions; for he knew that the re-action would produce comparative calmness.

"Rosamond," he at length said, "you *can* be reasonable when you choose—and I do hope that you have sufficient confidence in your father to accord him your attention and to believe what he may state to you. Listen then—and rest assured that I should never take the part of any one against my own daughter. I have seen Mrs. Slingsby."

Rosamond gave a convulsive start; but her father, appearing not to observe it, proceeded.

"It struck me," he continued, "that she would never have had the presumption and impudence to call here this morning, if she were really as guilty as you supposed her to be. I therefore deemed it an act of justice to ascertain the nature of those explanations which she proffered in this room, and which your presence cut short. With that object in view, I proceeded to her abode; and she assured me that she was entirely innocent of any connivance in the atrocity perpetrated by Sir Henry Courtenay—"

"Innocent!" almost shrieked Rosamond. "Oh! my dear father, you know not how specious—how plausible that woman can be when she chooses; and it has suited her purpose to be so with you. But be not deceived—"

"Do you imagine that I am not old enough and sufficiently experienced to discriminate between sincerity and duplicity?" demanded Mr. Torrens. "I tell you, Rosamond, that you wrong Mrs. Slingsby—that your suspicions are most injurious! Reflect—consider before you thus condemn! You overheard a few words which immediately threw you into a state of such excitement that your imagination tortured all the subsequent discourse into an evidence of guilt on the part of a lady who is deeply attached to you—who loves you as if she were your own mother—and who will die of grief if you continue thus to misjudge her. Yes, Rosamond—Mrs. Slingsby has declared that she will put a period to her existence if you persist in your present belief! She



accuses you of ingratitude towards her, after all her affectionate kindness in your behalf; and, should she carry her dreadful threat into execution—which I much fear, for she seems literally distracted—her blood will be upon your head!”

“Merciful heavens!” exclaimed Rosamond, appalled by this terrible announcement. “But if I cannot command my own convictions?” she added hastily.

“You must cherish a Christian spirit—you must be less prompt in forming opinions—less ready to arrive at those convictions which you represent to be uncontrollable,” said Mr. Torrens, endeavouring to bewilder his daughter, and thereby render her spirit ductile and her mind pliant, so that he might manage both as he pleased. “So far from nourishing malignity against Mrs. Slingsby, you should seek consolation with her: for your own mother is not here to console you!”

“God be thanked that my mother is not here to witness my disgrace!” ejaculated Rosamond, clasping her hands fervently.

“For the sake of my daughters I was wrong—yes, I was wrong not to have married again,” said Mr. Torrens, as if musing to himself. “I should have

given a protectress to my children—a lady who would have been a second mother to them; and then all this would not have occurred! But it is not yet too late to ensure your future welfare, Rosamond, by those means,” he added, turning towards his daughter, who had listened with surprise to her father’s previous observations; “and in accomplishing that aim, I may at the same time afford a convincing proof to a deserving, wrongly-suspected, and misjudged woman of my own esteem, and inferentially of your regret at the calumnious sentiments you have cherished concerning her.”

“My dear father—I do not understand you!” cried Rosamond, a dreadful suspicion weighing on her mind; and which, nevertheless, seemed so wild and ridiculous—so utterly impossible to be well-founded, that she fancied she had not rightly comprehended the sentiments of her parent.

“I am thinking how I can best ensure your welfare and happiness, Rosamond,” he said, “by giving you a substitute for that maternal protectress whom you have lost—one who will be a companion and a friend to you.”

“Father!” exclaimed Rosamond, horrified at the idea of having a step-mother, and trembling with

indescribable alarms lest she had indeed too well read her sire's intentions respecting the one whom he proposed to invest with that authority.

"Will you hear me with calmness?—will you subdue this excitement, which amounts to an undutiful aversion to all I am projecting for your sake?" demanded Mr. Torrens, again assuming a severe tone; then, perceiving that his daughter was dismayed by his manner, he hastily added, as if determined at once to put an end to a painful scene, "If I have consulted you, Rosamond, on the step that I propose to take, it was because I deemed you sensible and reasonable enough to merit that proof of confidence on my part, and obedient enough to submit becomingly to the dictates of my superior wisdom and experience. Know, then, that it is my intention to marry again—for your sake—and that my inclinations, as well as my interests, induce me to fix my choice upon Mrs. Slingsby."

Rosamond uttered not a word, but fell back senseless in her chair.

"Obstinate fool!" muttered Torrens between his teeth, as he hastened forward to save her from slipping off on the fender. "But I will neither argue nor consult any more—I will command, where I wish to be obeyed."

He applied a scent-bottle to her nostrils; and she soon gave signs of returning animation. Opening her eyes, she glanced wildly at her father, as if to interrogate him whether that were really true which appeared to have been haunting her like a horrid dream.

"Father—father," she murmured, grasping his hands; "you will not—no, you will not do what you have said! Oh! I implore you—I conjure—sacrifice not your own happiness and mine at the same instant! I was not mistaken in one syllable that I overheard between that woman and that man—and their discourse filled me with horror. She is his paramour, father—she is in a way to become a mother—"

"Silence, daughter!" cried Mr. Torrens, sternly. "And now listen to me, while I make you acquainted with my *commands*. Not only is it my intention to marry Mrs. Slingsby, but I desire that you will treat her with respect—if not with affection. And as you value my love and the continuance of my kindness, you will observe these instructions. If any thing more be wanting to induce you to comply with my desire, that additional argument will, perhaps, be found in the fact that if I do not marry Mrs. Slingsby, I shall be ruined—utterly undone—my property wrested from me—my person conveyed to a prison—and you thrust out, houseless and penniless, into the wide world, without a soul to protect or befriend you. Now I have told you all—and it is for you to decide whether your prejudices shall prevail against my most substantial interests."

Rosamond was astounded at the words which met her ears; and she knew not how to reply.

For a few moments she stood gazing vacantly upon her father's countenance, as if to read thereon a confirmation of words, the import of which seemed too terrible to be true: then, probably experiencing the necessity of seeking the solitude of her own chamber for the purpose of giving vent to the overflowing fullness of her heart's emotions, she hurried from the room.

Poor friendless girl! dreadful was the position in which she found herself placed! Oh! why were

not Clarence and Adelaïs near to console her—to receive her beneath their protecting influence? Alas! she would not have dared to face them, even were they in the metropolis at the time; for she could not have revealed to them her dishonour—Oh! no, she would sooner have died!

Throwing herself on a seat in the privacy of her bed-chamber, she burst into tears, and gave vent to her anguish in heart-rending sobs.

An hour passed—and still she thought not of retiring to rest;—she was in a state of utter despair!

She heard her father ascend to his chamber: but this circumstance reminded her not that the usual hour when she herself sought her couch had gone by.

Suddenly she was aroused from the deep reverie of woe that had succeeded the violent outburst of her anguish, by the movement of the handle of the door, as if some one were about to enter her room.

She started and listened, the bed being between the place where she was and the door, so that she could not see the latter.

Yes—some one was indeed entering the chamber.

With a faint scream she darted forward, and beheld a man in the act of closing the door behind him.

The intruder was Jeffreys, the recently-hired servant.

"What has brought you hither, John?" enquired Rosamond, in hasty and anxious tone—for she feared lest something had happened to her father.

"Nothink but your own beautiful self, Miss," answered the ruffian, advancing towards her as well as he was able—for he was much intoxicated.

"Begone!" cried Rosamond, her whole countenance becoming suddenly crimson with indignation. "Begone, I say—and to-morrow my father will know how to punish this insolence."

"Your father, Miss, won't do no such a thing," returned Jeffreys; "and it'll be all the worse for you if you holler. I know a many things that would n't render it safe for master to quarrel with me. So give me a kiss—"

"Villain!" exclaimed Rosamond, bursting into tears. "how dare you thus insult me? Leave the room—or I alarm the house at any risk!"—and she rushed towards the bell-pull.

"None of that nonsense, Miss—or I'll hang your father, as sure as you're alive!" said Jeffreys, placing his back to the door, folding his arms, and surveying Rosamond with the insolence of a licentious, drunken bully.

"Hang my father!" repeated the unhappy girl, staggering back and sinking into a chair—for so many dreadful things had recently occurred, that her mind was more attuned to give immediate credence to evil than to receive good tidings.

"Yes, by jingo!" said Jeffreys: "I can hang him any day I like. But what's more, I know pretty well all that's happened to you. I did n't listen for nothink at the parlour door this morning when that Mrs. Bingsby or Stingsby, or whatever her name is, was aere."

"My God! my God!" murmured Rosamond, pressing her hands to her brow with all her might—for she felt as if she were going mad.

"Now don't take on so, Miss," said Jeffreys: "I'm sure I did n't mean to vex you like that. But the fact is I've took a great fancy to you: and if so be I let out that your father did draw a knif across the throat of that baronet which come here last

night, and which I s'pose was the same you spoke of this morning to Mrs. Bingsby——"

"Monster!" shrieked Rosamond, in a shrill, penetrating tone—for she was unable any longer to subdue the horrible emotions which racked and tortured her, goading her almost to madness.

In another instant Mr. Torrens was heard to rush from his chamber—a moment more, and he forced his way into his daughter's room, hurling the villain Jeffreys forward with the violence exerted in dashing open the door.

"Father—dear father!" exclaimed Rosamond, springing into his arms; "save me—save me from that monster, who has told me such dreadful—dreadful things!"

"Be calm, Rosamond," said Mr. Torrens in a low and hoarse tone; "or you will alarm the other servant. Jeffreys," he added, turning towards the fellow who was swaying himself backwards and forwards, in the middle of the room, in that vain attempt to appear sober so often made by drunken men, "how dare you to intrude here? But follow me—I must speak to you alone."

"Father—one word," said Rosamond, in a voice indicative of deep feeling. "This man uttered a frightful accusation against you—Oh! an accusation so terrible that my blood curdles——"

"Nonsense, Rosamond!" interrupted Mr. Torrens, cruelly agitated: "you see that he has taken a drop too much—he is a good well meaning fellow—and will be very sorry in the morning——"

"Sorry! why the devil should I be sorry?" cried Jeffreys, with the dogged insolence of inebriation. "I do n't know what I've got to be sorry for——"

"Come, come," said Mr. Torrens, gently pushing his daughter aside, and approaching the man-servant in a coaxing, conciliatory way; "this is carrying the thing too far, John——"

"Well—well, we can talk it over in the morning, Miss—and I dare say we shall make matters right enough together," stammered the drunken hind, as he allowed himself to be led away from the chamber by Mr. Torrens. "You're a pretty gal—and if I said anything amiss——"

The almost maddened father hurried him over the threshold, and Rosamond hastened to secure the door behind them both.

Then flinging herself into a chair, she exclaimed "My God! what horrors have met my ears this night! Misfortunes—crimes—woes—fears—outrages have entered the house, like an army carrying desolation along with it! But my father—a murderer—Oh! heavens—no—no—it cannot be! And yet that dread accusation—so cool—so systematic—my God! my God!"

And she wept as if her heart would break.

From this painful—or rather most agonising condition of mind, she was aroused by a low knock at her door; and, in answer to her question who was there, the voice of her father replied.

She hastened to admit him;—but, as he entered, she started back, appalled by the ghastliness of his countenance, every lineament of which denoted horror and fearful emotions.

"Father, tell me all—keep me not in suspense—let me know the worst!" exclaimed Rosamond, clasping her hands in an imploring manner. "Dreadful things have happened, I am sure—and my brain is reeling, maddening!"

"Daughter," said Mr. Torrens, taking her hand,

"you *must* and you *shall* know the worst now—for I find that the miscreant Jeffreys has indeed told you too much for me to attempt to conceal the truth——"

"Just heavens! my father—stained with blood—the blood of vengeance on account of his dishonoured daughter;" said Rosamond, speaking in broken sentences and with hysterical excitement, while her eyes were fixed intently and with a fearfully wild expression upon the haggard countenance of her sire.

"No—not so, Rosamond," answered Mr. Torrens emphatically. "Sit down—there—and try and compose yourself for a few moments, while I give you an explanation which circumstances have rendered imperative."

The wretched girl suffered herself to be placed on a seat: her father then drew another chair close to the one which she occupied—and, leaning with folded arms over the back of it, he continued in these terms:—

"Last night—after you had retired to your room—Sir Henry Courtenay called. Yes—he dared to visit the house into which such dishonour and so much misery had been brought by his means. But he came to offer every possible atonement which it was in his power to make; and then I ascended to your room—here—to make you aware of his presence in the parlour below and of the proposals which I had received. But I found you in a state of mind too profoundly excited to bear the announcement—I remained with you to console and tranquillise you—and, when I saw that you were growing more calm, I retraced my way down stairs. Merciful heavens! what a spectacle then met my eyes!"

And Mr. Torrens, having introduced his fearful history by this deceptive and well coloured preface, proceeded to narrate the facts of the murder precisely as they had really occurred,—not forgetting to mention the robbery of a sum of money which he had left on the table. He then explained the part which John Jeffreys had subsequently performed in the occurrences of the preceding night; and he wound up in the following manner:—

"Thus you perceive, dear Rosamond, how a fearful combination of circumstances would fix dark and dreadful suspicions on me, were this tragedy to be brought to light. And now, too, you can understand how that miscreant Jeffreys dared to presume upon his knowledge of the shocking event—how, believing me to be completely in his power, he fancied that I dared not defend my own daughter from his licentious ruffianism. And, more than all this, Rosamond—Mrs. Slingsby holds me also beneath the rod of terrorism! For she knew that the baronet came hither last night—she knew also that he did not return—and I was compelled to reveal to her the whole truth, even as circumstances have now forced me to reveal it to you. And this is the secret of my intended marriage with her—a marriage that will take place to-morrow, and into which she has coerced me! Thus, Rosamond, if you ever loved and if you still love your unhappy father—pity him, pity him—but do not reproach him—nor aggravate his grief and his mental anguish by thought or deed on your part!"

So ingenuously had Mr. Torrens blended truth and fiction in his narrative, to work upon the feelings of his daughter,—so artfully had he combined and explained the various incidents in order to re-

present himself as the victim of cruel circumstances—that the generous-minded Rosamond felt the deepest commiseration and sympathy on behalf of her father rapidly taking possession of her soul.

"My dearest parent," she said, "I crave your pardon—I implore your forgiveness, for having wronged you by the most unjust—the most horrible suspicions! But the conduct of that man Jeffreys—his awful accusation—the reluctance you appeared to exhibit in dealing summarily with him, when you entered the room the first time this night,—all these things operated powerfully upon my mind, which has been attenuated by so many dreadful shocks within the last ten or twelve days! Alas! what sorrows have overtaken us—what perils environ us! Let us fly from this neighbourhood, dear father—let us leave England—"

"It is impossible, Rosamond!" interrupted Mr. Torrens hastily. "I had myself thought of that means of ensuring personal safety: but I abandoned the idea almost as soon as formed—for it was better to stay here, surrounded by danger, yet having bread to eat, than seek a foreign clime to starve!"

"We can work, dear father—we can toil for our livelihood! But, no—never should you be reduced to such a painful necessity, so long as your daughter has health and strength to labour for our mutual support!" exclaimed the excellent-hearted girl. "Oh! let us fly—let us quit this country—let us repair to France! I have some few accomplishments—drawing—music—a knowledge of all the branches of needle-work; and it will be hard indeed if I cannot earn enough to procure us bread."

"No—no, Rosamond—it cannot be!" said Mr. Torrens, tears now trickling down his cheeks—for the better he became acquainted with the admirable traits of his daughter's character—traits which adversity, misfortune, and danger now developed—the more bitterly did his heart smite him for the awful treachery he had perpetrated with regard to her.

"And wherefore is it impossible?" she asked. "Consider, my dear father, by what circumstances you are now surrounded. On one side is Jeffreys whom you dare not offend—whom you cannot discharge—and from whose ruffianism your daughter is not safe. On the other side, is this marriage with Mrs. Slingsby—a marriage which I now perceive to be forced upon you—a marriage that will bring into this house a person whom neither of us can ever love or respect!"

"Enough! enough! Rosamond," exclaimed Mr. Torrens: "all these sad things—these dangers and these sacrifices—have become interwoven with the destiny which it is mine to fulfil; and I must pursue my painful course—follow on my sad career, in the best manner that I may. I cannot risk starvation in a foreign land—I could not support an existence maintained by the toils of my daughter. Besides, I am confident of being able to realise a fortune by my speculations in this neighbourhood. Here, then, must I remain. And now, Rosamond, it remains for you to decide whether you will receive the mother-in-law whom imperious circumstances force upon you—or whether you will abandon your father!"

"Never, never will I leave you!" cried the affectionate girl, throwing her arms around her parent's neck, and embracing him tenderly.

The interview—the painful interview between the father and his child then terminated. The

former retired to his own apartment, a prey to feelings of the most harrowing nature; and the latter sought her couch, to which slumber was brought through sheer exhaustion.

But the horrors of the early portion of the night were perpetuated in her dreams!

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE FORGED CHEQUE.

OH! what a strange, and, at the same time, what a wondrous world is this in which we live;—and how marvellous is human progress! The utmost attainments effected by the wisdom of our ancestors were but ignorance and short-sightedness compared with the knowledge of the present day. Antiquity had its grand intellects and its sublime geniuses; but it furnished not the same abundance of materials to act upon as is afforded by the discoveries and likewise by the spirit of this age!

But are we proportionately happier, on this account, than were our forefathers? Is the working-man, for instance, more prosperous, more comfortable, more enviable as to his condition, than the aboriginal Briton who lived in a cave or the hollow of a tree, and who painted his body to protect it against the cold?

With all our prosperity—with all the grandeur, the glitter, and the refinement of our civilisation—with all our moralising institutions and our love of social order and mental improvement, we yet find the national heart devoured, tortured, and preyed upon by that undying serpent—PAUPERISM!

Yes: the millions are not so happy, so prosperous, or so comfortable as they ought to be;—for they are compelled to gnaw the tares of civilisation's field, while the proud and heartless oligarchy self-appropriate the corn!

Proud and heartless, indeed, are the rulers and the mighty ones of this land; and if the millions remain passive and patient, that pride and that heartlessness will grow, the one more despotic and the other more selfish.

It was but a few days ago that we marked two distinct articles in the morning newspapers, which formed a contrast fearfully significant in its evidence of the pride and the heartlessness which we abominate on the one hand, and of the distress and suffering which we so deeply deplore on the other.

One of these articles consisted but of *four lines*: the other occupied nearly *two columns*.

The first stated as laconically as possible that bread had risen to thirteen-pence the quarter loaf, and recorded a rapidly-disposed of regret that provisions should be so dear, on account of the poor. The second gave a laboured, fulsome, and tediously wire-drawn narrative of "Her Majesty's State Ball."

Thus the misery endured by millions in consequence of dearth and scarcity, is a trivial matter deserving only of *four lines*; whereas the trumpery nonsense and childish tom-foolery of a royal dance are deemed of sufficient importance to merit nearly *two columns*!

Oh! instead of giving balls and splendid entertainments at such a time, if the Sovereign of this land were to say to the people, "Ye are starving, and it makes my heart bleed to think that from

your very vitals are wrung the hundreds of thousands of pounds which are wasted by myself and the other members of the Royal Family on our frivolities, our whims, our caprices, and our wanton extravagances: therefore will I give ye back one half of the enormous income which I have hitherto enjoyed, in the full confidence that my example will be imitated by many others who prey upon you;"—did the Sovereign thus speak to the nation, the nation would be justly proud of its Sovereign; and yet this Sovereign would only be performing a duty dictated by humanity and common justice.

What would be thought of the father of a family who feasted on turtle and venison, accompanied by generous wines, every day, while his children were thrust into the cold, humid cellar, to devour a mouldy crust and drink water?

Yet the Sovereign delights in the attribute of a general and comprehensive paternal solicitude in the welfare of the people: but it is an attribute which exists only in the imaginations of grovelling courtiers or lick-spittle historians.

Royalty and Aristocracy are intensely—necessarily—and thoroughly selfish: and as for any anxiety on behalf of the toiling and suffering millions, the idea is absurd—the notion is a mere delusion—the assertion that such a feeling exists, is a lie—a monstrous, wicked, atrocious lie!

There is more of the milk of human kindness in a single cottage than in all the palaces of Europe taken together.

There is more true philanthropy in one poor man's hovel, than in a thousand mansions of the great and wealthy in the fashionable quarters of London.

Oh! if the father or the mother can dance and be glad while the children are famishing, the sooner all ties are severed between such worthless parents and such an oppressed and outraged offspring, the better!

Nero danced and sang on the summit of a tower at the spectacle presented to his eyes by burning Rome;—and festivity and rejoicing reign in our English palaces, at a moment when scarcity menaces the land with famine and its invariable attendant—pestilence!

People of England! ye now understand how much sympathy ye may expect on the part of those who derive all their wealth from the sweat of your brow!

People of Ireland! ye now comprehend how much pity your starving condition excites on the part of your rulers!

People of Scotland! ye now perceive how worthy the great ones of the realm are of your adulation!

But it is sickening, as it is sorrowful, to dwell on this subject. Some of our readers may perhaps ask us wherefore we broach it at all? We will reply by means of a few questions. Is not every individual member of a society interested in the welfare of that society? or ought he not at least to be so? Is he not justified in denouncing the errors or the downright turpitude of the magistrates whom that society has chosen to govern it, and who derive their power only from its good will and pleasure? or is it not indeed his duty to proclaim those errors and that turpitude? Should not this duty be performed, even if it be unpleasant? and can we ever hope to ameliorate our condition, unless we expose the abuses which oppress, degrade, and demoralise us?

Oh! let no one rashly and in a random manner say that he cares nothing about politics! Such an assertion denotes a wilful disregard not only of his neighbour's interests, but also of his own. Were all men to entertain such an indifference, the people would be the veriest slaves that an unrestrained despotism and an unwatched tyranny could render them. It is as necessary for the industrious classes to protect their rights and privileges by zealously guarding them, as to adopt precautions to save their houses from fire.

One word more. It is a common saying, and as absurd as it is common—"Oh! women have no right to meddle in politics." Women, on the contrary, have as much right as "the lords of the creation" to exhibit an interest in the systems and institutions by which they are governed. For the sake of their children, as well as for their own, they should assert and exercise that right. It is a lamentable delusion to suppose that the intellect of woman is not powerful nor comprehensive enough to embrace such considerations. The intellect of woman is naturally as strong as that of man; but it has less chances and less opportunities of developing its capacity. The masculine study of politics would aid the intellect of woman in putting forth its strength; and we hope that the day is gone by when the female sex are to be limited to the occupations of the drawing-room, the nursery, or the kitchen. We do not wish to see women become soldiers or sailors, nor to work at severe employment; but we are anxious to behold them *thinkers* as well as *readers*—utilitarians as well as domestic economists. And we know of no greater benefit that could be conferred on society in general, than that which might be derived from the influence of the well developed intellect of woman. Her mind is naturally better poised than that of man: far-seeing and quick-sighted is she;—a readiness at devising and combining plans to meet emergencies, is intuitive with her. Her judgment is correct—her taste good;—and she profits by experience far more usefully than does man. Is it not absurd, then—is it not unjust—and is it not unwise to deny to woman the right of exercising her proper influence in that society of which she is the ornament and the delight?

Alas! that there should be such exceptions to the general rule of female excellence, as Martha Slingsby, —a woman whose principles were thoroughly corrupt, whose licentious passions were of the most devouring, insatiable kind, and whose talent for wicked combinations and evil plottings was unfortunately so great!

Let us return to this hypocritical and abandoned creature, and follow her in the vile scheme which now occupies all her attention.

Having breakfasted at an early hour, she seated herself at her desk, whence she drew forth a packet of letters received by her at various times from Sir Henry Courtenay, and the signatures of which now became the objects of her special study. The art of counterfeiting the late baronet's autograph was practised by her for nearly half an hour; for though she was already tolerably confident of her ability to forge his signature most successfully,—as she had assured Mr. Torrens,—she nevertheless deemed it prudent to render the imitation as perfect as possible.

At last the atrocious deed was accomplished to her complete satisfaction; and a cheque for two

thousand pounds lay, drawn in a thoroughly business-like manner, upon her desk!

She was bold and courageous in the execution of plots and the carrying out of deep schemes,—but this dark and dangerous crime which she had just perpetrated, caused her to shudder from head to foot! Hitherto all her wickedness had been of a nature calculated only, if detected, to involve her in disgrace, and not in peril—to ruin her character, but not place her life in jeopardy! Now she had taken a step—a bold and desperate step—which at once set her on the high road that conducts all those who are found treading its pathway, to the foot of the scaffold!

Yes—she shrank back and she trembled violently as she rose from the desk whereon the forged cheque now lay; and for a moment she was inclined to seize it—to rend it into a thousand pieces—and thus to dispel at once and in an instant the tremendous black cloud of stormy danger which she had drawn over her own head.

But, no—she had courage enough to be wicked and rash; but she had not strength of mind sufficient to render her prudent. She therefore decided on daring all—risking every thing, by the presentation of the forged cheque!

Having dressed herself in a style of unusual elegance, she proceeded in a hackney-coach to Lombard Street, and alighted at the door of the banking-house on which the cheque was drawn.

Saying to herself,—“Now for the aid of all my courage!”—she entered the spacious establishment, and advanced towards the counter.

One of the numerous clerks in attendance instantly received the cheque which she handed across to him;—and, as it left her hand, a chill struck to her heart—and she would at that moment have given worlds to recall it.

Her composure was now only the effect of utter desperation; but so unruffled was her countenance, that not a lineament was so changed as to be calculated to engender suspicion.

The clerk took the cheque to the nearest desk upon the counter; and after reading it with more than usual attention, as Mrs. Slingsby thought, he said, “This is dated the day before yesterday, madam. Have you seen Sir Henry Courtenay since then?”

“I have not,” answered Mrs. Slingsby, wondering how she was able to speak in a tone so cold and collected. “I believe,” she added, “that he is gone out of town.”

“Pardon the question, madam,” observed the clerk; “but one of his servants was here last evening, just before closing time, to enquire if we had seen Sir Henry;”—then, after a few moments’ pause, he said, “How will you have this?”

Immense was the relief suddenly experienced by the guilty woman! She seemed as if drawn abruptly forth from the depths of an ocean in which she had been suffocating—drowning. The revulsion of feeling was so great, that, whereas she had been enabled to stand without support throughout the few minutes of frightful ordeal just passed, she was now compelled to cling to the counter, though the clerk observed not her emotion.

Having specified the manner in which she desired the amount of the cheque to be paid her, Mrs. Slingsby received the produce of her crime, and quitted the bank.

She was now so astounded at the complete suc-

cess of her scheme,—although, when able to reflect calmly upon it, she had never once doubted the issue,—that she could scarcely believe in its realization. Her brain whirled—her heart palpitated violently, as she ascended the steps of the hackney-coach;—and its motion, as it rolled away from the door of the bank, increased the excitement under which she was now labouring.

On her return to Old Burlington Street, she found Mr. Torrens waiting for her, it being nearly twelve o’clock—the hour appointed for their visit to the solicitor.

The moment she entered the drawing-room, Mr. Torrens rose from his seat, and advanced towards her, his eyes fixed intently upon her countenance.

In fact Mr. Torrens was deeply anxious to learn the result of the bold venture which Mrs. Slingsby was that morning to make. With him it was now a matter of pecuniary ruin or salvation; and he had overcome so many difficulties already,—stiffing his own scruples at taking an immodest woman for his wife, and reducing his daughter to a belief in the necessity of his submitting to this matrimonial arrangement,—that he trembled lest some unforeseen accident should thwart him just at the moment when he appeared to be touching on the goal of success. Moreover, he had that morning, ere quitting home, so contrived matters with John Jeffreys as to induce this man to leave his service without delay; and he had enjoyed the supreme satisfaction of seeing that dangerous person leave his house ere he himself had set out to keep his appointment with Mrs. Slingsby. Thus every thing had progressed in accordance with Mr. Torrens’ views and wishes, so far as the preliminaries to his change of condition were involved.

“Well, my dear madam, what tidings?” he eagerly demanded, as he approached to meet Mrs. Slingsby.

“I have succeeded,” she said, throwing herself into a chair. “But I would not for worlds undergo again the same dreadful alternations between acute suspense and thrilling joy—cold tremor and feverish excitement.”

“And yet the transaction has given a charming glow of animation to your countenance,” observed Mr. Torrens, now for the first time inflamed by desire in respect to the amorous widow whom he was shortly to make his wife. “I have procured the license; and —”

“And Rosamond—what of her?” demanded Mrs. Slingsby hastily.

“She will receive you with a respectful welcome at Torrens Cottage,” was the answer. “By dint of reasoning with her, I overcame all her scruples, and rendered her pliant and ductile to our purposes.”

“All progresses well, then,” said Mrs. Slingsby. “Let us now away to Mr. Howard.”

And to that gentleman’s office did the pair proceed. Their business was soon explained to the attorney, who manifested no surprise nor any particular emotion at the singularity of the transaction; for Mr. Howard was a perfect man of business, ready to receive instructions without expressing any feelings at all calculated to annoy his clients, and never indicating a curiosity to learn more than those clients might choose to confide to him.

“I am to keep this sum of two thousand pounds until such time as Mr. Torrens may claim it in the

capacity of your husband?" he said, as coolly and quietly as if he were receiving a deposit on the purchase of an estate.

"Exactly so," answered Mrs. Slingsby.

"And to-morrow morning, my dear sir," added Mr. Torrens, with a smile, "I shall come to claim it."

"Good," exclaimed Mr. Howard, locking up the bank-notes and gold in his iron safe. "I give you joy, Mr. Torrens: Mrs. Slingsby, I wish you all possible happiness."

Thus speaking, the attorney bowed his clients out of the office.

Mr. Torrens escorted Mrs. Slingsby back to Old Burlington Street, and then repaired as fast as his horse and gig would take him to his own dwelling, to sit down to an early dinner, and afterwards dress himself for the interesting ceremony of the evening.

But on his arrival at the Cottage, he learnt from the female servant, who opened the door, that his daughter Rosamond had left home an hour previously.

"Left home!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens. "But she will return?" he continued interrogatively. "Did she not say that she would return?"

"She desired me to give you this note, sir," answered the domestic.

Mr. Torrens tore open the letter placed in his hands, and read the following unimpressive lines:—

"Pardon me, dearest father, for the step which I am now taking; but I cannot—cannot support the idea of dwelling beneath the same roof with that lady who is soon to be my mother-in-law. I know that I promised not to desert the paternal home: that promise was given in sincerity—though maddening reflections now render me incapable of keeping it. You are well aware how dreadfully my feelings have been wounded—how cruelly my heart has been lacerated, during the last few hours, and I have struggled against the violence of my grief—I have endeavoured to subdue my anguish,—but the occurrences of last night—the outrage attempted by that villain Jeffreys—the revelation of the terrible secret relative to Sir Henry Courtenay—Oh! my dear father, a mind ten thousand times stronger than that of your unhappy daughter could not endure the weight of all this aggregate of misery! Therefore, sooner that my presence should render my father's house unhappy, I depart thence, hoping to be followed by your blessing! Grieve not for me, dear father—heaven will protect me! From time to time I shall write to you; and should happier days arrive—but of that, alas! I dare entertain no hope at present. To you must I leave the painful task of accounting to my dearest, dearest sister and her esteemed husband for my absence when you see them again. Farewell—farewell, my beloved father! I scarcely know what I have written—my brain is on fire—my heart is ready to burst—my eyes are dimmed with tears."

The servant watched the countenance of her master with evident interest and curiosity as he perused this note.

"Did Miss Rosamond appear much excited?" he asked, in a tremulous tone, and without raising his eyes from the letter which he held in his hand.

"She was crying very much, sir," responded the servant; "and it made me quite sad to see her. I attempted to comfort her; but she only shook her head impatiently, and then sobbed as if her heart would break. I knew that she was going to leave, because she had a small package in her hand; and she did cry so dreadful when she told me to give you this note."

Mr. Torrens turned aside, and hastened to his chamber, where he remained until half-past five o'clock. He then descended to the parlour, dressed for the nuptial ceremony. To the servant's enquiry

relative to the serving up of the dinner, he replied that he had no appetite, and immediately gave orders for the horse and gig to be got ready by a stable-boy, who had been hastily hired in the morning to take the place of Jeffreys until a more efficient substitute could be found.

This command was soon obeyed, and shortly before seven o'clock Mr. Torrens arrived in Old Burlington Street.

The flight of his daughter from home had proved a more severe shock to him than the reader might imagine, considering the cold and heartless disposition of this man. It was not that he felt he should miss her society;—no—he did not love her enough to harbour a regret of that nature;—but her departure from the paternal dwelling had made him writhe beneath the maddening—the galling conviction that his independence was in a measure gone, and that a stern necessity had compelled him to assent to link his fate with that of a woman so vile and abandoned, that his own child fled at the idea of her approach.

Influenced by such feelings as these, it was no easy task for Mr. Torrens to assume a complacent demeanour suitable to the occasion of his nuptials. He, nevertheless, managed to conceal the emotions which wrung him so acutely, and played his part with tolerable satisfaction to Mrs. Slingsby as she introduced him to Dr. Wagtail and the other guests, including a clergyman, who were already assembled at her house.

The ceremony was performed by the reverend gentleman just alluded to, Dr. Wagtail giving the bride away. A splendid banquet was then served up; and shortly after ten o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Torrens departed together for the Cottage.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE REWARD OF CRIME.

AT half-past eleven on the following morning, Mr. Torrens entered the office of Mr. Howard, the solicitor.

His countenance wore a smile of satisfaction, in spite of the various events which had lately occurred to harass him; for he was about to receive a large sum of money—and his fingers itched to grasp the bank-notes and the gold which he had seen stowed away in the safe on the preceding day.

He already beheld his debts paid—his mind freed from pecuniary anxieties—and his speculations prospering in a manner giving assurance of the realization of a splendid fortune; and these pleasing visions, with which his imagination had cheered itself during the drive from the Cottage to the attorney's office, naturally tended to bestow on his countenance the expansiveness of good humour.

And, after all, it is a pleasant thing to enter a place where one is about to receive a good round sum of money, even though the amount will not remain long in pocket, but must be paid away almost as soon as fingered.

Mr. Torrens had never felt more independent than he did on this occasion; and the look which he bestowed upon a poor beggar-woman with a child in her arms, as he ascended the steps leading to the front-door of Mr. Howard's abode, was one

of supreme contempt—as if a pauper were indeed a despicable object!

Well—Mr. Torrens entered the office with a smiling countenance:—but he was immediately struck by the strange aspect of things which there presented itself.

The place was in confusion. The clerks were gathered together in a group near the window, looking particularly gloomy, and conversing in whispers;—several gentlemen were busily employed in examining the japanned boxes which bore their names and contained their title-deeds;—and two or three females were weeping in a corner, and exchanging such dimly significant observations as—“Oh! the rascal!”—“The villain!”—“To rob us poor creatures!”

Mr. Torrens recoiled, aghast and speechless, from the contemplation of this alarming scene. A chill struck to his heart: and, in common parlance, any one might have knocked him down with a straw.

“Good heavens’ gentlemen,” he exclaimed, at length recovering the use of his tongue: “what is the meaning of this?”

“Ask those youngsters there, sir,” said one of the individuals engaged in examining the tin-boxes: and the speaker pointed towards the clerks in a manner which seemed to imply that the news were too shocking for *him* to unfold, and that it was more-over the duty of the lawyer’s subordinates to give the required information.

“Well, gentlemen, what is the matter?” demanded Mr. Torrens, turning to the clerks. “Has any thing sudden happened to Mr. Howard?”

“Oh! very sudden indeed, sir,” was the answer vouchsafed by one of the persons thus appealed to, and accompanied by a sinister grin.

“Is he dead?” enquired Mr. Torrens, his excitement now becoming absolutely intolerable.

“No, sir—he isn’t dead exactly—but——”

“But what?” cried Torrens, trembling from head to foot.

“He’s bolted, sir!” was the astounding answer.

“Absconded!” murmured Mr. Torrens faintly;—and, reeling like a drunken man, he would have fallen had he not come in contact with the wall.

Yes—it was indeed too true: Mr. Howard—the cold, phlegmatic, matter-of-fact, business-like lawyer—had decamped no one knew whither, though numbers had to mourn or curse his flight!

“Are you ill, sir?” enquired one of the clerks, at the expiration of a few moments; for Mr. Torrens was leaning against the side of the room, his countenance pale as death, his eyes rolling wildly in their sockets, and his limbs trembling convulsively.

“No—no—I shall be better in a minute,” groaned the unhappy man. “But this blow—is cruel—indeed!” he gasped in a choking voice. “Two thousand pounds—ruin—ruin!”

“Ah! there’s many who’ll be ruined by this smash, sir,” said the clerk: “you’re not the only one—and that’s a consolation.”

A consolation indeed!

It was none for Mr. Torrens, who saw himself ruined beyond all hope of redemption,—ruined in spite of the immense sacrifices he had made to avert the impending storm—the sacrifice of his daughter’s innocence to Sir Henry Courtenay, and the sacrifice of himself to an abandoned and profligate woman!

Miserable—miserable man! what hast thou earned by all thine intrigues—thy schemings—thy black

turpitude—and thy deplorable self-degradation? Oh! better—better far is it to become the grovelling, whining beggar in the streets, than to risk happiness—character—name—honour—all, on such chances as those on which thou didst reckon!

And now, behold him issue forth from that office into which he had entered with head erect, self-sufficient air, and smiling countenance:—behold him issue forth—bent down—crushed—overcome—ten years more aged than he was a few minutes previously,—and an object of pity even for that poor beggar-woman whom ere now he had treated with such sovereign contempt!

Miserable—miserable man! has not thy punishment commenced in this world?—is there not a hell upon earth?—and is not thy heart already a prey to devouring flames, and thy tongue parched with the insatiate thirst of burning fever, and thy soul tortured by the undying worm? Oh! how canst thou return to thy house in the vicinity of which lies interred a corpse the discovery of which may at any time involve thee in serious peril?—how canst thou go back to that dwelling whence thine injured daughter has fled, and over the threshold of which thou hast conducted a vile strumpet as thy bride?

When we consider how fearfully we are made,—how manifold are the chances that extreme grief—sudden ruin—and overwhelming anguish may cause a vessel in the surcharged heart to burst, or the racked brain to become a prey to the thunder-clap of apoplexy,—it is surprising—it is truly wondrous that man can support such an enormous weight of care without being stricken dead when it falls upon him!

And yet to what a degree of tension may the fibres of the heart be wrung, ere they will snap asunder!—and what myriads of weighty and maddening thoughts may agitate in the brain, ere reason will rock on its throne, or a vein burst with the gush of blood!

* * * * *

In the meantime occurrences of importance were taking place at Torrens Cottage.

Mrs. Torrens—late Mrs. Slingsby—was whiling away an hour in unpacking her boxes and disposing of her effects in the wardrobe and cupboards of her bed-chamber; congratulating herself all the time on the success which her various schemes had experienced. She had obtained a husband to save her from disgrace; and that husband had set out to receive, as she fancied, a considerable sum of money, which would relieve him of his difficulties, and enable him to pursue his undertakings in such a manner as to yield ample revenues for the future! She was moreover rejoiced that Rosamond had quitted the house;—for, shameless as this vile woman was, she could not have failed to be embarrassed and constrained in her new dwelling, had that injured girl met her there!

While Mrs. Torrens was thus engaged with her domestic avocations and her self-gratulatory thoughts in her bed-chamber, the stable-boy, who had been hired on the preceding day, was occupying himself in the garden.

“Well, what do you think of your new missus?” he said to the maid-servant, who had just been filling a stone-pitcher at the pump in the yard.

“She seems a decent body enow,” was the reply. “But I haven’t seen much of her yet. What are you doing there, Harry?”

“Why, you must know that I’m rather a good hand



at gardening," answered the lad, desisting from his occupation of digging a hole in the ground, and resting on his spade: "and I'm going to move that young tree to this spot here—because it's all in the shade where it stands now, and will never come to no good."

"Ah! that's one of the young trees that Jeffreys planted—him who went away so suddenly yesterday morning, and which made me come and fetch you to help us here," observed the maid. "But, come—go on with your work," she added, laughing; "and let me see whether you really know how to handle a spade."

"Well—you shall see," returned the boy; and he fell to work again with the more alacrity because a pretty girl was watching his progress. "But I'll tell you fairly," he said, after a few minutes' pause in the conversation, "this digging here is no proof of what I can do; because the ground is quite soft—and the more I dig, the surer I am that the earth has been turned up here very lately."

"That I am certain it has not," exclaimed the maid-servant.

"But I say that it has, though," persisted Harry. "Look here—how easy it is to dig out! Do you think I don't know?"

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"You fancy yourself very clever, my boy," said the female-domestic, laughing: "but you're wrong for once. We had no man-servant here before Jeffreys come—and he never dug there, I declare."

"Now, I just tell you what I'll do for the fun of the thing," cried the lad. "I'll dig out all the earth as far down as it has been dug out before—because I can now see that a hole *has been dug* here," he added emphatically.

"You're an obstinate fellow to stand out so," said the maid. "But I'll come back in five minutes and see how you get on."

The good-natured servant hastened into the kitchen with the pitcher of water in her hand; and the lad continued his delving occupation in such thorough earnest that the perspiration poured down his forehead.

By the time the maid-servant returned to the spot where he was digging, he had thrown out a great quantity of earth, and had already made a hole at least three feet deep.

"Still hard at work?" she said. "Why, you have made a place deep enough to bury that little sapling in! And what a curious shape the hole is, to be sure! Just for all the world like as if it was dug to put a dead body in! I wish you would n't go on digging

in that way, Harry—I shall dream of nothing but graves—”

A cry of horror, bursting from the lips of the boy, interrupted the maid-servant's good-natured loquacity.

“What is it, Harry?” she demanded, peeping timidly into the hole, from which the boy hastily scrambled out.

“You talk of dead bodies,” he cried, shuddering from head to foot, and with a countenance ashy pale;—“but look there—a human hand—”

The maid shrieked, and darted back into the kitchen, uttering ejaculations of horror.

Mrs. Torrens heard those sounds of alarm, and hastily descended the stairs.

“Oh! missus,” cried the boy, whom she encountered in the passage leading from the hall to the back door of the house; “such a horrible sight—Oh, missus! what shall we do?—what will become of us?”

“Speak—explain yourself!” said Mrs. Torrens, amazed and frightened at the strange agitation and convulsed appearance of the boy.

“Oh! missus,” he repeated, his eyes rolling wildly, and his countenance denoting indescribable terror: “in that hole there—a dead body—a man's hand—”

“Merciful heavens!” shrieked Mrs. Torrens, now becoming dreadfully agitated in her turn—for, rapid as lightning-flash, did the thought strike her that the corpse of Sir Henry Courtenay was discovered.

Yes, missus—'tis a man's hand, peeping out of the earth,” continued the lad; “and I'm afraid I hacked it with the shovel—but I'm sure I did n't mean to do no such a thing!”

The newly-married lady staggered, as these frightful words fell upon her ears—and a film spread over her eyes.

But a sudden and peremptory knock at the front-door recalled her to herself; and she ordered the trembling maid, who was now standing at the kitchen entrance, to hasten and answer the summons.

The moment the front-door was opened, two stout men, shabby-genteel in appearance, and smelling uncommonly of gin-and-peppermint, walked unceremoniously into the hall.

“Is Mrs. Torrens at home, my dear?” said one, who carried an ash-stick in his hand: “'cos if she is, you'll please to tell her that two gentlemen is a waiting to say a word to her.”

“What name?” demanded the servant-maid, by no means well pleased at the familiar tone in which she was addressed.

“Oh! what name?” repeated the self-styled gentleman with the ash-stick: “well—you may say Mr. Brown and Mr. Thompson, my dear.”

“I am Mrs. Torrens, gentlemen,” said that lady, who having overheard the preceding dialogue, now came forward; “and I suppose that you are the persons sent by the auctioneer about the sale of my furniture in Old Burlington Street.”

“Well—not exactly that neither, ma'am,” returned the individual with the ash-stick. “The fact is we're officers—”

“Officers!” shrieked the miserable woman, an appalling change coming over her.

“Yes—and we've got a warrant agin you for forgery, ma'am,” added the Bow Street runner, who was no other than the reader's old acquaintance Mr. Dykes.

Mrs. Torrens uttered a dreadful scream, and fell senseless on the floor.

“Come, young o'man, bustle about, and get your missus some water, and vinegar, and so on,” exclaimed

Dykes. “Here, Bingham, my boy, lend a helping hand, and we'll take the poor creatur into the parlour.”

The two officers accordingly raised the insensible woman and carried her into the adjacent room, where they deposited her on the sofa—that sofa which had proved the death-bed of her paramour! In the meantime the servant-maid, though almost bewildered by the dreadful occurrences of the morning, hastened to procure the necessary articles to aid in the recovery of her mistress; and in a few minutes Mrs. Torrens opened her eyes.

Gazing wildly around her, she exclaimed, “Where am I?”—then, encountering the sinister looks of the two runners, she again uttered a piercing scream, and clasping her hands together, murmured, “My God! my God!”

For a full sense of all the tremendous horror of her situation burst upon her; and there was a world of mental anguish in those ejaculations.

“She's a fine o'man,” whispered Dykes to his friend, while the good-natured servant endeavoured to console her mistress.

“Yes, she be,” replied Bingham; “what a pity 'tis that she's sure to be scragged!”

“So it is,” added Mr. Dykes. “And now, you stay here, old chap—while I just make a search about the place to see if I can find any of the blunt raised by the forgery.”

Thus speaking, the officer quitted the room.

“Oh! ma'am, pray do n't take on so,” said the good-natured servant-maid, endeavouring to console her mistress. “It must be some mistake—I know it is,—you never could have done what they say! I wish master would come home—he'd soon put 'em out of the place.”

“My God! my God! what will become of me?” murmured Mrs. Torrens, pressing her hand to her forehead. “Oh! what shall I do? what will the world say? Just heavens! this is terrible—terrible!”

At that moment the parlour door was opened violently, and Mr. Dykes made his appearance, dragging in the lad Harry, who was struggling to get away, and blubbering as if his heart were ready to break.

“Hold your tongue, you damned young fool!” cried Dykes, giving him a good shake, which only made him bawl out the more lustily: “no one ain't a going to do you no harm—but we must keep you as a witness. Bless the boy—I don't suppose you had any hand in the murder.”

These last words brought back to the mind of Mrs. Torrens the dread discovery which had ere now been made in the garden, and the remembrance of which had been chased away by the appalling peril that had suddenly overtaken her: but at the observation of the Bow Street runner to the boy, she uttered a faint hysterical scream, and fell back in a state of semi-stupefaction.

“Murder did you say, old fellow?” demanded Bingham.

“Yes—summut in that way,” returned Dykes. “At all events there's a man with his throat cut from ear to ear lying at the bottom of a hole in the garden—”

“You don't mean to say he was left all uncovered like that?” exclaimed Bingham.

“No—no,” answered Dykes. “Them as did for him, buried him safe enough; and it seems that this boy has been a-digging there, and comes to a hand sticking out of the ground. So he's too much afeared to go down any farther; but I deuced soon shovelled

out the earth—and, behold ye! there lies the deadliest spectacle you ever see, Bingham, in all your life. But it won't do to waste time in talking here. You cut over to Streatham and get a couple of constables—'cos there's plenty of work for us all in this house, it seems."

Bingham departed to execute the commission thus confided to him; and Dykes remained behind in charge of the premises.

It would be impossible to describe the wretchedness of the scene which was now taking place in the parlour. The lad Harry was crying in one corner, despite the assurances which Dykes had given him;—the maid-servant, horrified and alarmed at all the incidents which had occurred within the last quarter of an hour, was anxious to depart from a house which circumstances now rendered terrible; but she could not make up her mind to leave Mrs. Torrens, who was in a most deplorable condition;—for the unhappy woman lay, gasping for breath and moaning piteously, on the sofa—her countenance distorted with the dreadful workings of her agitated soul, and her eyes fixed and glassy beneath their half-closed lids!

Dykes accosted the boy, and, was beginning to put some questions to him with a view to ascertain when it was likely that Mr. Torrens would return, when that gentleman suddenly drove up to the door in his gig.

"Now, my lad," said Dykes, "go and open the door, and mind and do n't utter a word about what has taken place here this morning."

The boy hastened to admit Mr. Torrens, who passed him by without even appearing to notice his presence, and proceeded straight to the parlour in a mechanical kind of manner, which showed how deeply his thoughts were occupied with some all-absorbing subject.

But the moment the ruined, wretched man opened the door, he shrank back from the scene which offered itself to his view; for the condition of his wife, and the presence of so suspicious-looking a person as Mr. Dykes told the entire tale at once—the forgery had been discovered!

"Oh! master," exclaimed the servant-maid, "I am so glad you're come back;—for your poor dear lady——"

"Yes, master—and that dreadful sight in the garden," interrupted the boy, whimpering again,— "the murdered man in the hole——"

Mr. Torrens staggered—reeled—and would have fallen, had not Dykes caught him by the arm, saying, "Sit down, sir—and compose yourself. I'm very sorry that I should have been the cause of unsettling your good lady so, sir: but I'm obliged to do my dooty. And as for t' other business in the garden—I s'pose——"

"I presume you are an officer?" cried Mr. Torrens, suddenly recovering his presence of mind, as if he had called some desperate resolution to his aid.

"That's just what I am, sir," answered Dykes.

"And you have come here to—to——"

"To arrest Mrs. Slingsby that was—Mrs. Torrings that is—for forgery, was my business in the first instance," continued Dykes; "and now its grown more serious, 'cos of a orkard discovery made in the garden——"

"What?" demanded Torrens, with strange abruptness: but he was a prey to the most frightful suspense, and was anxious to learn at once whether any suspicion attached itself to him relative to that discovery, the nature of which he could full well understand.

"The dead body—the murdered gentleman, master!" exclaimed the lad Harry, throwing terrified glances around him.

"I do not understand you!" said Mr. Torrens, in a hoarse—hollow tone: "what do you mean? All this is quite strange—and therefore the more alarming to me."

But the ghastly pallor and dreadful workings of his countenance instantly confirmed in the mind of Dykes the suspicion he had already entertained—namely, that Mr. Torrens was not ignorant of the shocking deed now brought to light: and the officer accordingly had but one course to pursue.

"Mr. Torrens, sir," he said, "the less you talk on this here business, perhaps the better, 'cos every word that's uttered here must be repeated again elsewhere; and it will be my dooty to take you afore a magistrate——"

"Take me!" ejaculated the wretched man; and his eyes were fixed in horrified amazement on the officer.

"I'm sorry to say I must do so," answered Dykes.

"Martha—Martha!" ejaculated Torrens, starting from the seat in which the officer had just now deposited him, and speaking in such wild, unearthly tones that those who heard him thought he had suddenly gone raving mad: "why do you lie moaning there? Get up—and face the danger bravely—bravely! Ah! ah! here is a fine ending to all our glorious schemes!"—and he laughed frantically. "Howard has run away—absconded—gone, I tell you! Yes—gone, with the two thousand pounds! But I did not murder Sir Henry Courtenay!" he continued, abruptly reverting to the most horrible of all the frightful subjects which racked his brain. "No—it was not I who murdered him—you know it was not, Martha!"

And he sank back, exhausted and fainting, in the seat from which he had risen.

"Sir Henry Courtenay!" cried Dykes. "Well—this is strange; for it's on account of forging his name that the lady is arrested—and notice of his disappearance was given at our office this morning."

Late that evening the entire metropolis was thrown into amazement by the report "that a gentleman, named Torrens, who had hitherto borne an excellent character, and was much respected by all his friends and acquaintances, had been committed to Newgate on a charge of murder, the victim being Sir Henry Courtenay, Baronet." And this rumour was coupled with the intelligence "that the prisoner's wife, to whom he had only been married on the previous day, and who was so well known in the religious and philanthropic circles by the name of Slingsby, had been consigned to the same goal on a charge of forgery."

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

OLD DEATH'S PARTY.

WHILE these rumours were circulating throughout the metropolis, Old Death was preparing for the reception of visitors at his abode in Horsemonger Lane.

The aged miscreant, assisted by the old woman who acted as his housekeeper, arranged bottles, glasses, pipes, and tobacco on the table—made up

a good fire so that the kettle might boil by the time the guests should arrive—and carefully secured the shutters of the window in order to prevent the sounds of joviality from penetrating beyond that room.

When these preparations were completed, the old woman was despatched to the nearest cook's-shop to procure a quantity of cold meat for the supper; and shortly after her return with the provender, the visitors made their appearance—arriving singly, at short intervals.

The housekeeper was dismissed to her own room: and the four men, having seated themselves at the table, began to mix their grog according to their taste.

"I s'pose you've heard the news, Mr. Bones?" said Jeffreys.

"About your late master and his wife—eh?" asked Old Death.

"Just so. They're in a pretty pickle—ain't they?" exclaimed Jeffreys, with a chuckle. "We little thought last night, when we was a talking over the whole business and dividing the swag, that the corpse would so soon turn up again. But, I say," he added, now breaking out into a horrible laugh, and turning towards Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler, "it was rather curious, though, that I should have had a hand in burying that there feller which you made away with."

"And still more curious," replied Tim, "that we should have done for a stranger, while the master of the house his-self escaped altogether. But 'tis no use talking of that there now. I wish it had n't happened. It was however done in a hurry—"

"Never mind the little windpipe-slitting affair," said Josh Pedler impatiently. "We got the swag—Old Death here smashed the screens*—and that's all we ought to think of. Twelve hundred between us was n't such a bad night's work—although it did lead us to do a thing we never did afore."

"And now my late master is certain sure to be scragged for it," exclaimed Jeffreys; "for no one could believe such a tale as he must tell in his defence. Well—I'm not sorry for him: he is a harsh, reserved, sullen kind of a chap. But there's one thing I'm precious sorry for—"

"What's that?" demanded Old Death.

"Why—he promised me fifty pounds, to be paid this evening at seven o'clock," answered Jeffreys; "on condition that I'd leave his service at an instant's notice: and the blunt is n't of course forthcoming."

"Never mind that—do n't make yourself uneasy, my boy," said Old Death, with a significant chuckle. "You've got plenty of money for the present: and the business which we've met to talk about, will put ever so much more into your pocket."

"Well—let's to business, then," exclaimed Jeffreys. "The fact is, I shan't go out to service no more; for, since I'm regularly in with you fellers now, I shall stick to you."

"And I can always find you employment, lads," observed Old Death. "Come—help yourselves: we shall get on so much more comfortable when we're a little warmed with good liquor."

"The cunning old file!" exclaimed Tim the Snammer, laughing and winking at his comrade, Josh Pedler; "he wants to make us half lousy so as to get us to undertake anything, no matter how desperate, on his own terms."

"'Pon my word, Tim," said Old Death, affecting a pleasant chuckle, which however sounded like the echo of a deep-toned voice in a cavern, "you are too hard upon me. I do n't mean any such thing. I'll treat you liberally whatever you do for me."

"And so you ought, old boy," returned Tim Splint. "for you know how I suffered by you—and how cursed shabby you behaved towards me."

"We agreed yesterday to let bygones be bygones," said Benjamin Bones, somewhat sternly. "Do you mean to keep to that arrangement? or am I to consider that you still bear me a grudge?"

"No—no," cried Tim. "What I said was only in fun. So tip us your hand, old boy. There! Now we'll each blow another glass—and you shall explain your business, while we blow a cloud."

The fresh supplies of grog were duly mixed: Jeffreys, Josh Pedler, and Tim Splint lighted their pipes;—and Old Death addressed them in the following manner:—

"There is a man in London who has done me a most serious injury—an injury so great that I can never cease to feel its consequences as long as I live. In a word," continued Old Death, his features becoming absolutely hideous with the workings of evil passions, "he discovered my secret stores—he destroyed all the treasures, the valuables, and the possessions which I had been years and years in accumulating."

"Destroyed them!" cried Tim Splint. "Stole them, you mean?"

"No—destroyed them—wantonly destroyed them—destroyed them all—all!" yelled forth Old Death, his usually sepulchral voice becoming thrilling and penetrating with hyena-like rage. "The miscreant!—the fiend! All—all was destroyed! Thousands and thousands of pounds' worth of valuables wantonly—wilfully—methodically destroyed! I did not see the work of ruin: but I know that it must have taken place—because the man of whom I speak is what the world calls honourable! Perdition take such honour!"

"But of what use was all that property to you, since you did n't convert it into money?" demanded Josh Pedler.

"Of what use?" cried Old Death, again speaking in that yelling tone which manifested violent emotions. "Is there no use in keeping precious things to look at—to gloat upon—to calculate their value? To be sure—to be sure there is," he continued, with a horrible chuckle. "But of that no matter. It is sufficient for you to know that I was deprived in one hour—in one minute, as you may say—of that property which had been accumulating for years. And the house, too, which was mine so long—which I had purchased on account of its conveniences,—even those premises this man of whom I speak, made me sell him. But I swore to have vengeance on him—I told him so when we parted—and I will keep my word!"

"Who is this person that you speak of?" asked Tim the Snammer.

"The Earl of Ellingham," was the reply.

"He is a great and a powerful nobleman, I suppose," observed Tim. "It will be difficult and dangerous to do him any harm."

"What's a nobleman more than another?" cried John Jeffreys. "I for one will undertake any thing that our friend Mr. Bones may propose."

"And so will I—if we're well paid," added Josh

* Changed the notes.

Pedler. "But there's one thing I must mention while I think on it. Do n't none of you ever speak about that affair down at Torrings's, you know—the cut-throat business, I mean—before my blowen, Matilda. I like to have a little comfort at home; and a woman's tongue is the devil, when it's set a wagging in the blowing-up way."

"We'll mind our p's and q's before 'Tilda," said Tim the Snammer. "It is 'nt likely that any of us would be such fools as to talk of that business to women, or to others besides ourselves. But let Mr. Bones continue his explanations."

"I have told you enough," resumed Old Death, "to convince you that this Earl of Ellingham deserves no mercy at my hands; and if I say that I will give each of you a hundred pounds—yes, a hundred pounds each—to do my bidding in all things calculated to accomplish my vengeance on that man,—if I make you this promise, I suppose you will not refuse to enlist yourselves in my employ. But, mark you!" he added hastily, and with a sinister knitting of the brows; "before you give me your answer, bear in mind that my vengeance is to be terrible—terrible in the extreme!"

"You mean to have the Earl murdered, I suppose?" said John Jeffreys.

"Murdered—killed!—no—no," exclaimed Old Death; "that would be a vengeance little calculated to appease me! *He must live to know—to feel that I am avenged,*" added the malignant old villain. "He must experience such outrages—such insults—such ignominy,—that he may writhe and smart under them like a worm under the teeth of the harrow. He must be made aware whence the blow comes—by whose order it is dealt—and wherefore it is levelled against him. Will you, then, for one week devote yourselves to my service? If you agree, I will at once give you an earnest of the sums promised as your recompense: if you refuse, there is an end of the matter—and I must look out elsewhere."

"But you have n't told us what we are to do to earn our reward," said Josh Pedler.

"There is no murder in the case," observed Old Death, emphatically.

"Then I for one consent without another minute's hesitation," exclaimed Josh Pedler.

"And me too," said Tim the Snammer.

"And I'm sure I'm not going to hang back," cried John Jeffreys.

"Good!" continued Benjamin Bones. "Though you've all got plenty of money in your pockets, there's no harm in having more. I will give you each thirty pounds on account of the business I have now in hand," he added, taking his greasy pocket-book from the bosom of his old grey coat.

The specified amount was handed over to each of the three villains, who received the bank-notes with immense satisfaction.

"Three or four more things like Torrings's and this," observed Tim the Snammer, "and we shall be able to set up in business as gentlemen for the rest of our lives."

"Now listen to me," resumed Old Death, his countenance expressing an infernal triumph, as if his vengeance were already more than half consummated. "In the first place I must tell you that I'm going to move to-morrow morning up to Bunce's house, in Earl Street, Seven Dials; and to-morrow night must you perform the first duty I require of you."

"And what's that?" demanded Josh Pedler.

"You know that a few weeks ago a certain person, named Thomas Rainford, was hanged at Horse-monger Lane Gaol, proceeded Old Death, glancing rapidly around from beneath his shaggy, overhanging brows.

"The very prince of highwaymen—a glorious fellow,—a man that I could have loved!" exclaimed Josh Pedler, in a tone the enthusiasm of which denoted his heart's sincerity.

"Well—well," said Old Death, impatiently: "but he's put out of the way—dead—and gone—and it's no use regretting him. I suppose," he added, "that if you saw Tom Rain's body here, you would n't mind spitting in the face of the corpse, or treating it with any other kind of indignity, if you was well rewarded for your pains!"

"Why—my respect for the man while he was living would n't make me such a fool to my own interests as to refuse to do what you say now that he's dead," answered Josh Pedler. "Besides, a dead body's a lump of clay, or earth—or whatever else you may choose to call it: at all events it can't feel any thing that's done to it. But what in the world has made you touch on such a queer subject?"

"Because it is with Tom Rain's body that you will have to come in contact to-morrow night!" responded Old Death, in a low, sepulchral voice, and now fixing his eyes as it were on all the three at the same time.

And those three men started with astonishment at this extraordinary and incomprehensible announcement.

"Yes," proceeded Benjamin Bones: "it is just as I tell you—for the late Thomas Rainford was the elder brother of the Earl of Ellingham, and was legitimately born!"

This declaration excited fresh surprise on the part of the three men to whom it was addressed.

"And therefore," continued the aged miscreant, his countenance contracting with savage wrinkles, "it must be by the desecration of the corpse of Tom Rain, that the Earl will be alike exposed to the whole world and goaded to desperation by the insult offered to the remains of his brother. Now do you begin to understand me? No! Well, then I will explain myself more fully. It is known that the Earl demanded of the Sheriff the corpse of the highwayman—that his request was complied with—and that the body was interred privately in consecrated ground. I set people to make enquiries; and it was only this morning—this very morning—I learnt that a coffin, with the name of THOMAS RAINFORD on the plate, was buried in Saint Luke's church-yard. This intelligence my friend Tidmarsh gleaned from the sexton of that church. To-morrow night," added Old Death, "it is for you three to have up that coffin and convey it to the Bunces' house in Earl Street, Seven Dials."

"Do you want us to turn resurrectionists?" demanded Josh Pedler, in unfeigned surprise.

"I wish you to do what I direct, and what I am going to pay you well for," answered Benjamin Bones. "If you refuse, give me back my money, and I'll find others who will be less particular."

"Oh! I do n't want to fly from the bargain," said Josh; "only you'll allow me the right of being astonished if I choose—or rather if I can't help it. As for the resurrection part of the business, I'd have

up all the coffins in Saint Luke's church-yard on the same terms."

"I thought you were not the man to retreat from a bargain," observed Old Death. "Well—when you have brought the coffin to Earl Street, we'll take out the body, put a rope round its neck, and a placard on its breast: and that placard shall tell all the world that it is the corpse of *Thomas Rainford, the famous highwayman who was executed at Horsemonger Lane Gaol, and who was the rightful Earl of Ellingham*! This being done, it will be for you to convey the body to Pall Mall, just before daybreak, and place it on the steps of the hated nobleman's mansion."

"There will be danger and difficulty in performing that part of the task," said Tim the Snammer.

"Not at all," exclaimed Old Death. "A light spring cart will speedily convey the burthen to Pall Mall; and it will be but the work of a few moments to achieve the rest. Besides, at that hour in the morning there is no one abroad."

"All this can be managed easy enough," observed Jeffreys. "I don't flinch, for one. Is that every thing we shall have to do?"

"No—no," replied Ben Bones, with a grim smile: "I can't quite give three hundred pounds for one night's work. But since we are on the subject, I may as well explain to you what else I require in order to render my vengeance complete."

The three men replenished their glasses and their pipes; and Old Death then proceeded to address them in the following manner:—

"From certain information which I have received, I am confident that the Earl of Ellingham experiences a great friendship towards Esther de Medina, who was, I am pretty certain, Rainford's mistress."

It must be remembered that Benjamin Bones knew nothing of those incidents which have revealed to the reader the existence of Tamar—her beautiful sister's counterpart.

"This Esther de Medina is now in London, having been absent for a short time with her father. Another important point is that the newspapers some weeks ago announced the intended marriage of the Earl of Ellingham and Lady Hatfield. We are therefore aware of these two facts—that the Earl is attached to Esther de Medina as a friend, and to Lady Hatfield as her future husband."

It may also be proper to remind the reader that as Old Death knew nothing more of the position in which the nobleman and Georgiana stood with regard to each other, than what he had gleaned from the fashionable intelligence in the public prints,—so he was completely ignorant of all the circumstances which had tended to break off the alliance thus announced.

"Now," resumed the malignant old fiend, his eyes glistening with demoniac spite, as he glanced rapidly from Josh Pedler to Tim the Snammer, and from Tim the Snammer to John Jeffreys,—“now, it is my intention to wound the heart of that hated Earl—that detested nobleman, through the medium of his best affections! Yes—by torturing those ladies, I shall torture him: by subjecting them to frightful inflictions I shall punish him with awful severity. For to-morrow night, my good friends, your occupation is chalked out: for the night after, the task will be to inveigle Esther de Medina to the house in Earl Street; and on the night after that, Lady Hatfield must also be enticed thither. How these points are to be accomplished, I will tell you when the time for action comes."

"And what do you mean to do with the two ladies when you get them there?" demanded Tim the Snammer.

"What will I do to them?" repeated Old Death, his features animated with a malignity so horrible—so reptile-like, that he was at the moment a spectacle hideous to contemplate: "what will I do to them? I will tell them all I have endured—all I have suffered at the hands of the hated—the abhorred Earl of Ellingham;—and you three will be at hand to hold them tight—to bind them—to gag them,—so that I, with a wire heated red-hot—may—"

"What?" demanded Jeffreys impatiently.

"Blind them!" returned Old Death, sinking his voice to a whisper, which sounded hollow and sepulchral.

The three villains—villains as they were—started at the frightful intention thus announced to them.

"Yes—I will put out their beautiful eyes," said Benjamin Bones, clenching his fists with feverish excitement: "then I will leave them bound hand and foot in the house, and will send a letter to the Earl to tell him where he may seek for them! Will not such vengeance as this be sweet? Did you ever hear of a vengeance more complete? The Earl I leave unhurt, save *in mind*—and there he will be cruelly lacerated! But he must have his eyes to see that those whom he loves are blind—he must be spared his powers of vision, that he may read in the newspapers the account of those indignities which will have been shown to the corpse of his elder brother!"

And, as he feasted his imagination with these projects of diabolical vengeance, the horrible old man chuckled in his usual style,—as if it were a corpse that so chuckled!

The three miscreants, whom he had taken into his service, expressed their readiness to assist him in all his nefarious plans; for the reward he had promised them was great, and the earnest they had received was most exhilarating to their evil spirits.

The infernal project having been fully discussed, and it having been agreed that Tidmarsh should proceed with one of the three villains in the morning to Saint Luke's churchyard, to point out the precise spot where the coffin bearing the name of Thomas Rainford had been interred,—all preliminaries, in a word, having been thus settled, the old housekeeper was summoned to place the supper upon the table.

The meal was done hearty justice to; and when the things were cleared away, Old Death, who was anxious to conciliate his friends as much as possible by a show of liberality, commissioned John Jeffreys to compound a mighty jorum of punch, the ingredients for which were bountifully supplied from the cupboard, the wash-hand basin serving as a bowl.

And now the four villains—four villains as hardened and as ready for mischief as any to be found in all London—dismissed from their minds every matter of "business," and set to work to do justice to the punch.

"Come—who'll sing us a song?" exclaimed Tim the Snammer.

"Do n't let us have any singing, my dear friend," said Old Death: "we shall alarm the neighbours—and it's better to be as quiet as possible."

"Well, we must do something to amuse ourselves," insisted Timothy Splint. "If we get talking, it will only be on things of which we all have quite enough."

in our minds; and so I vote that some one tells us a story: I'm very fond of stories—particklerly when they're true."

"I'll tell you a true story, if you like," said Jeffreys: "for I do n't mind about smoking any more. In fact, I'll give you my own history—and a precious curious one it is, too."

"Do," said Josh Pedler. "But mind and do n't introduce no lies into it—that's all."

"Every word is as true as gospel," observed Jeffreys.

The glasses were replenished—Old Death snuffed the candles with his withered, trembling hand—and Jeffreys then commenced his narrative, which, as in former instances, we have modelled into a readable shape.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE HISTORY OF A LIVERY-SERVANT.

"My parents were very poor, but very honest; and I was their only child. My father was a light porter in a warehouse, earning fifteen shillings a week; and my mother took in washing to obtain a few shillings more. We lived in a court leading out of High Holborn, and occupied one room, which was very decently furnished for people in my parents' condition of life, the things moreover being all their own. My father had a good suit of clothes, and my mother a nice gown, bonnet, and shawl, for Sundays and holidays; and they also took care to keep me neat and decent in my dress. Neither of them ever went to the public-house except just to fetch the beer for dinner and supper; and they were always regular in their attendance at church. In addition to all these proofs of good conduct and respectability, they put by two or three shillings a-week as a provision against a rainy day; and you may be sure that to be able to do this, they lived very economically indeed. In fact a more industrious couple did not exist than my father and mother; and you will admit that they deserved to succeed in the world. This much I have heard from people who knew them; for they died when I was too young to be able to understand their ways or judge of their merits.

"It seems that my mother was a very pretty young woman. She had been a servant in the family of the merchant in whose warehouse my father was; and, an attachment, springing up between them, they married. The merchant, whose name was Shawe, had a son—a dissipated young man, addicted to gaming and bad company, and consequently a source of great uneasiness to his parents, who were highly respectable people. During the time that my mother was in service at the merchant's, Frederick Shawe was on the Continent, his father having sent him to a commercial establishment at Rotterdam, in the hope that he would amend his ways when under the care of comparative strangers. But this hope, it appears, was completely disappointed; and the young man was after all sent back to his father's house as irreclaimable. At this time my parents had been married three years, and I was two years old. My mother was in the habit of taking my father's dinner to him at the warehouse, whenever his duties prevented him from running home to get it; and on one of these occasions, Frederick Shawe saw

her as she was going out of the establishment. He followed her, made insulting proposals, and behaved most grossly. She had me with her; and this circumstance rendered his conduct the more abominable, if any thing was wanting to aggravate it. Indeed, his persecution was carried to such an excess, that she was obliged to take refuge in a shop, where she went into hysterics through fright and indignation. Shawe sneaked away the moment he found that the master of the shop was disposed to take my mother's part against him; and when she was a little recovered, she was sent home in a hackney-coach. On the return of my father in the evening, she told him all that had occurred, and it seems that she had scarcely made an end of her narrative, when Frederick Shawe entered the room. He declared that he had come to express his sincere penitence for what he had done, and to implore that his father might not be made acquainted with his behaviour. He seemed so earnest, and so excessively sorry for his infamous conduct, that my parents consented to look over it. He thanked them over and over again, and took his departure. My father, however, desired his wife never to come to the warehouse to him any more, as he was unwilling to expose her to even the chance of a repetition of the insult.

"A few weeks after this occurrence Frederick Shawe one evening, when under the influence of liquor, called at our lodgings, my father being absent, and renewed his outrageous conduct towards my mother. An alarm was created in the dwelling—a constable was sent for—and the young gentleman was taken off to the watch-house. Of course the matter was now too serious to be hushed up; and the elder Mr. Shawe necessarily learnt all the particulars. His son was fined and held to bail to keep the peace towards Mrs. Jeffreys; and my father obtained another situation—for though the old merchant knew that his son was alone to blame, yet my father thought that he could not prudently remain in a place where he must daily meet a person who, he felt convinced, was now his sworn enemy. And such indeed did Frederick Shawe prove to be; for by misrepresentations and heaven only knows what other underhand means, he so successfully avenged himself that my poor father soon lost his new situation, and was totally unable to find another. The most infamous reports were circulated concerning him; and he took the cruel treatment he had received so much to heart, that his spirit was completely broken—he fell ill, and died in a few weeks.

"Poverty and despair thus seized upon my mother at the same moment. She saw all her happiness suddenly blasted by the agency of a reckless villain; and, to add to her afflictions, the only friend who showed any compassion for her or who came forward to assist her in the midst of her wretchedness—namely, the old merchant—was suddenly snatched away by the hand of death, ten days after the earth had closed over my father's remains. The poor woman was unable to bear up against her sorrows: she languished for a few months, and then departed this life, leaving me a friendless and unprotected orphan at the tender age of three years! You may guess what then became of me: I was taken to the workhouse!

"I have sketched these circumstances just to show you how unfortunate I was in my earliest infancy

My parents would have lived to thrive and prosper had it not been for the miscreant Frederick Shawe; and under their protection I should have been happy. However, it was destined that my father and mother should be cut off thus early; and their cruel fate threw me as a pauper-child upon the parish. At the workhouse I remained until I was thirteen; and it was from an elderly couple whom distress brought to the same place, and who had known my parents well, that I learnt all the particulars which I have related to you. Well, at the age of thirteen I was transferred to the care of a surgeon and accoucheur, who took me into his house to clean the boots and shoes, run on errands, and beat up drugs in the mortar. Finding me active and, as he said, a good-looking lad—for I was not then seared with the small-pox as I am now—he put me into the regular livery of a doctor's boy after I had been with him a few months; and I was then entrusted with the delivery of the medicine. My master was an old man; and his wife was a bustling, active, elderly lady, in whom implicit confidence might be placed as long as she was well paid for her services and her secrecy. You will understand what I mean very shortly. In fact one day I noticed a great deal of whispering between the doctor, his wife, and the housekeeper; and their looks were mysterious and important. Certain preparations, too, commenced, which showed me that a visitor was expected; for I was a shrewd and observing boy for my age. I was ordered to clean the windows in the spare bed-room and the well-furnished little parlour communicating with it; and while I was thus occupied, the housekeeper put the two apartments into the nicest possible order. I asked her if any one was coming to stay at the house, and was desired to mind my own business. I accordingly held my tongue; but my curiosity was only the more excited in consequence of the answer I received and the mystery in which the motive of the preparations in progress was involved. At an earlier hour than usual I was ordered to retire to my own room; but as it commanded a view of the street—it was Brook Street, Holborn—I sat up, watching at my window—for I felt sure that I had not been dismissed to my attic without some good reason. Nor was I mistaken. At about half-past ten a hackney-coach drove up to the door: two trunks were carried into the house, and a lady, muffled in a cloak, was assisted to descend from the vehicle by the doctor and his wife, who seemed to treat her with the greatest respect. I was able to notice all that passed, because the moon was bright and I was looking out of the open window. The lady accompanied the doctor and his wife in-doors; and the coach drove away.

"Next morning I saw the housekeeper take up a breakfast-tray to those rooms which I had now no doubt were occupied by the lady who had arrived the night before; but I was cautious not to appear even to notice that anything unusual was going on, much less to ask questions,—for I remembered the rebuff I had already received in this latter respect. The cook and housemaid were as mysteriously reserved as the housekeeper herself; and I could not for the life of me make out what it all meant. To be brief, a month passed away; and though I never saw the tenant of the spare-rooms all the while, yet I knew that a tenant those rooms had; for the meals were regularly taken up—the doctor looked in there

two or three times a day—and his wife passed hours together there. At length the housemaid, who was a pretty, wicked-looking girl of about nineteen, undertook to initiate me into the secret which so much puzzled me; and, taking advantage of a Sunday evening when she and I were alone together, the other servants having gone out, she explained how some young lady, who was not married, was about to become a mother—and how the spare-rooms were always kept for lodgers of that kind.—'Have you seen her?' I asked.—'No,' she replied.—'nor am I likely to see her. I have been four years in this house, and during that time there have been eight or ten ladies here in the same way; but I never caught a glimpse of the face of any one of them. They pay, or their friends pay for them, a good round sum to master for the accommodation, and that is the manner in which he has made so much money; for you can see that his regular practice is not very great. But you must not tell any body that I have been talking to you in this style, John; or else I shall lose my place.'—I promised her not to betray her.—'How old are you, John?' she asked.—'Going on for fourteen,' I said.—'You are a pretty boy,' she continued. 'Would you like to give me a kiss?'—'You would think me very rude,' I answered.—'No, I should n't: try.'—'But I should feel so ashamed,' I said.—'Then you are a fool, John,' exclaimed the pretty housemaid; and she got into a pet, which lasted all the rest of the evening.

"I lay awake a long time that night thinking of what I had heard concerning the lady in the private apartments; and, I can't say how it was—but I felt an extraordinary longing to catch a glimpse of her. The more I reflected on this wish, the stronger it grew: and at last I determined to gratify it somehow or another. Having come to this resolution I fell asleep. Next morning the two-penny postman at eight o'clock brought a letter directed to my master; but in the corner were two or three initials which I could not quite make out. I took it into the parlour, where the doctor was seated alone at the time; and, when he had glanced at the address, he said, 'Oh! it is to go up stairs: give it to the housekeeper:—'and he went on reading his newspaper. Here was an opportunity which presented itself almost as soon as my desire to see the tenant of the spare-rooms had been formed; and, without any hesitation, I hurried up stairs. I knocked at the door of the parlour communicating with the bed-chamber; and a sweet voice said, 'Come in.' I accordingly entered the room and beheld a beautiful creature of about seventeen or eighteen, dressed in a morning wrapper, all open at the bosom, and reclining in an arm-chair. She uttered an exclamation of surprise when she saw me, and drew the wrapper completely over her breast. It was evident that she had expected to see either the housekeeper or my mistress. I handed her the note, stammered out something about 'Master having told me to bring it up,' and then retired, awkward and embarrassed enough. A few minutes afterwards the bell of the spare-rooms was rung rather violently; and the housekeeper went up. She shortly came down again, and went into the parlour, to which I was presently summoned. The doctor and his wife were seated at the breakfast-table, looking as gloomy and solemn as possible: and the housekeeper was standing in the middle of



the room. 'I suspected that a storm was brewing. 'John,' said the doctor, 'what induced you to take such a liberty as to enter the apartments of a lady who is lodging in my house?'—'Please, sir,' I answered, as boldly as possible, 'you told me to take up the letter; and I did so.'—The doctor, his wife, and the housekeeper looked at each other by turns; and then they all three looked very hard at me. 'Well,' said the doctor, 'I suppose it *was* a misunderstanding on the boy's part;—for I did not blush nor seem at all confused while they were all staring at me.—' But you must not tell any one that you saw the lady up stairs, John,' exclaimed my mistress.—'I don't know a soul who would care about knowing such a simple thing, ma'am,' I replied, pretending to be very innocent indeed. I was then told to withdraw; and thus passed off this little affair.

"Throughout that day I saw the pretty housemaid showing great anxiety to speak to me alone; but circumstances so occurred, that we had not an opportunity of exchanging a word in private together. At half-past nine I went to bed as usual, an hour before the other servants; and I soon fell asleep. But I was awoken by some one shaking me gently;

and I was also startled by seeing a light in the room. In another moment my fears subsided; for my visitor was the pretty servant-girl in her night-gear. She sat down on the edge of the bed, and asked me what I was called into the parlour for in the morning. I told her all that had occurred. 'You are a dear boy,' she said 'not to have confessed that I had put you up to any thing; for that was what I was afraid of.'—and she gave me two or three hearty kisses. Then she asked me a great number of questions about the lady I had seen—what she was like—how old—the colour of her hair and eyes— and all sorts of queries of that kind. I replied as well as I could; and she seemed vastly to enjoy the idea of my cool impudence in taking up the letter just for the sake of getting a peep at the lady. In fact she was so much pleased with me, that she kept on kissing me; and all this ended just as you might suppose—for the pretty house-maid shared my bed during the remainder of the night. This occurrence was most unfortunate to us both; for we over-slept ourselves,—and the house-keeper, doubtless having vainly searched for us down stairs, came up to look after us. We were discovered fast asleep, in each other's arms; and a terrible scene ensued. The house-

keeper alarmed the doctor and his wife with her cries—for I suppose the old lady was quite scandalised, though she herself had often chucked me under the chin in a tender manner. The result was that the pretty house-maid was packed off without delay; and I was stripped of my livery, compelled to put on my workhouse clothes again, and sent back to the parish officers.

"At the very moment when I was conveyed into the presence of the overseers by the doctor, a muddled lady, magnificently dressed, was returning to her carriage which waited at the door. She immediately recognised the doctor as an acquaintance, and he addressed her by the name of Mrs. Beaumont. The exchange of a few remarks led the lady to observe that she had applied to the parish officers for a well-conducted, genteel-looking lad to take the place of a page in her household; and, as she spoke, she eyed me very attentively. The doctor informed her that I had been in his service and was a good boy in all respects save one:—and he explained to her the indiscretion which had compelled him to part with me; adding, 'The lad was no doubt won over by the young woman herself; but as my professional success depends on the reputation of my house, I could not overlook this occurrence.'—The lady declared that she entertained great compassion for me, and said what a pity it was that such a nice boy should be thrown back on the parish. In a word, the business ended by her agreeing to take me on trial; and, before the doctor left me, he whispered in my ear, 'You see, John, that I have not ruined your character as I might have done; and therefore you must be a good lad, and never mention to any one that you saw the lady who is now lodging at my house.'—He then took his departure; and Mrs. Beaumont, having arranged with the overseers relative to receiving me into her service, desired that I might be sent to her abode in the evening. The instructions were obeyed; and I entered my new place, the first appearances of which pleased me much.

"Mrs. Beaumont was a widow-lady of about six-and-forty, and was still a very handsome woman considering her age. Her house was in Russell Square; and she lived in an elegant style—keeping a butler, a footman, and three female domestics. She had a Miss Stacey residing with her as a companion; and this lady was about five or six-and-twenty—somewhat stout—and rather good-looking. The moment I entered my new place, I was supplied with a page's livery, and was informed that I was to consider myself at the orders of the butler. I soon found that I had got into very comfortable quarters; for the best of provisions were consumed in the kitchen as well as in the parlour, and the butler, who was fond of a glass of good liquor himself, often treated me to some likewise. Mrs. Beaumont saw a great deal of company; and there were dinner-parties or evening-parties at least three or four times every week. I had not been many days in this place, before I began to notice that both Mrs. Beaumont and Miss Stacey treated me with much the same kind of innocent familiarity which the housekeeper at the doctor's had shown towards me. They would pat me on the cheek, or chuck me under the chin, and tell me I was nice boy: but this they never did before each other—only when I happened to be alone with either one of them. Indeed, when they *were* together, and I entered the room to an-

swer the bell or for any other purpose connected with my duties, they would both appear as indifferent towards me as if they had never shown any other feeling in my behalf. Of the two I liked Miss Stacey much the best, because she was younger and I felt a strange excitement come over me whenever she began to toy about with me in the way I have described. One day, when I entered the drawing room, where I found her alone at the time, she said to me, 'John, you are a very nice boy; and here is half-a-guinea for you to buy what you like. Only do n't let any one know that I gave you the money.'—'Certainly not, Miss,' I replied.—'And now, John,' she continued, 'I want you to answer me a question which I am going to put to you. Will you tell me the truth?'—I of course declared that I would.—'Then tell me,' she said, patting my face, and looking full at me with her large blue eyes, 'does Mrs. Beaumont ever play about with you as I do?'—'Oh! never, Miss,' I answered immediately, and without undergoing the least change of countenance.—'You are a good boy, John,' she said; and pulling me towards her, covered me with kisses. A double-knock at the front-door interrupted her amusement, which, as you may suppose, I took in very good part; and she hurried me out of the room, enjoining me not to tell any one that she played about with me.

"The next day Mrs. Beaumont was rather indisposed, and kept her own chamber until the evening, when she descended to the drawing-room. Miss Stacey had gone out to a party at a married sister's; and, the footman being absent likewise, it devolved upon me to take up the tea-tray. 'Well, John, said my mistress, 'are you comfortable in your present place?'—'Quite, thank you, ma'am,' I replied.—'You like it better than the doctor's?' she continued, smoothing down my hair, and then passing her hand over my face.—'Oh! a great deal ma'am.'—'But do you not miss the pretty servant-girl, John?' she asked, with a sly look and a half smile. 'Why, what a naughty boy you must be, and at such an age too!'—'It was all the young woman's fault, ma'am,' I said; 'and I hope you do not think any the worse of me for it.'—'If I had I should not have taken you into my service, John,' she answered. 'And to show you that I am really attached to you and consider you to be a very good boy, here's a sovereign for you. It is not on account of your wages, mind; but a little gift. You must not however tell any body that I gave it to you, or else you will make the other servants jealous.'—'I'll be sure not to tell, ma'am,' I said; 'and I thank you very much.'—'And now, John,' continued Mrs. Beaumont, 'I have one question to put to you, and you must tell me the truth. Does Miss Stacey ever speak kindly to you? I mean, does she ever do anything to show you that she likes you better than the other servants?'—'No, ma'am,' I replied. 'On the contrary, I fancy she sometimes speaks sharp to me.'—'Oh! indeed,' said Mrs. Beaumont; and she then subjected me to the same kissing process that I had undergone on the part of Miss Stacey—only I did not like it quite so well. The old lady hugged me very tight, and seemed as if she wanted to say something, but did not exactly like to do so. At last she spoke out plainly enough, though in a whispering tone 'John,' she said, 'I just now gave you a sovereign because you are a good boy; and I will give you another if you will do what I ask you and not tell any one about it. Should you like to have another so

vereign?'—'Very much indeed, ma'am,' I answered. —'Well, then,' continued Mrs. Beaumont, 'you must come to my room to-night, when the house is all quiet; because I want to speak to you very particularly indeed.'—'But I promised the servants, ma'am, to sit up to let Miss Stacey in,' I answered. —'So much the better,' observed Mrs. Beaumont. 'Miss Stacey has promised to be back by twelve at latest; and as soon as you have let her in, you can go up to your own room, and then a few minutes afterwards come down to mine.'—I promised to do exactly as I was desired; and, having received a few more kisses and pawings about, was suffered to return to the kitchen.

"The footman came back at eleven; and as Mrs. Beaumont had already retired to her chamber, all the servants except myself went off to theirs. I then remained alone in the kitchen, thinking of what had occurred between my mistress and myself, and not half liking the idea of sleeping with her—for I knew very well what her object was in asking me to go to her room. I wished it had been Miss Stacey who had made such an appointment with me; for, young as I was, I was greatly smitten with that lady; and I thought she had never looked so well as when I saw her that evening dressed for the party to which she had gone. She had on a very low gown, and her neck was so beautifully white, and her naked arms seemed so plump, that I was really quite in love with her. It gave me great pleasure to think that I had been chosen to sit up for her, and I longed for her return. The clock struck twelve; and a few minutes afterwards a vehicle stopped at the door. I knew it must be Miss Stacey who had come back, and I did not wait for the knock and ring, but hurried to the hall to admit her. She seemed pleased when she saw who it was that opened the door for her; and I observed that her countenance was rather flushed, as if she had been drinking an extra glass of champagne, of which I knew she was very fond. The moment I had closed and bolted the door, she asked me in a low whisper, whether any of the other servants were up. I answered in the negative.—'Does your mistress know that you are sitting up for me?' she next inquired. —'No, Miss,' I unhesitatingly said.—She began to caress me, and I found that she smelt rather strong of wine; but she looked so nice that I did not care about that; and I was so excited that I kissed her in return.—'Light me up stairs, John,' she at length said; 'and let us go as gently as possible, so as not to make any noise, on account of Mrs. Beaumont, who is unwell.'—I led the way up stairs, my heart beating violently; for I more than half suspected that I should not keep my appointment with my mistress that night. Nor was I mistaken: for, on reaching the door of Miss Stacey's chamber, she took my hand, drew me towards her, and said in a low, hurried whisper, 'Come down to my room in about a quarter of an hour: I wish to speak to you very particularly indeed.'—I promised to do so, and hurried up to my own chamber, Miss Stacey having previously lighted her candle and said, 'Good night, John,' in a tolerably loud voice, but making a sign to convince me that it was only a precaution on her part. When I reached my room, I sat down on the bed to think how I should act. My inclination prompted me to keep the appointment with Miss Stacey; my fears urged me to keep the one given me by Mrs. Beaumont. I cared nothing about

the sovereign promised me by my mistress, now that I had received such an invitation from her pretty companion; and I thought that it would be very easy to excuse myself to Mrs. Beaumont, should she question me next day, by saying that I fancied her to be only joking, or perhaps trying me. So, at last, I resolved to follow my inclinations, and disregard my fears; and I acted in pursuance of this determination. I accordingly repaired to Miss Stacey's room, and was completely happy.

"We had been an hour together, when a knock at the door alarmed us. Who could it be? what could it mean? We remained silent as the dead. The knock was repeated, and was immediately followed by Mrs. Beaumont's voice, saying, 'Miss Stacey, dear! Miss Stacey!'—'Good God! what can she want?' whispered Miss Stacey to me; 'she is perhaps unwell, and will come into the room to speak to me. John, my dear boy, you must get under the bed, and keep as quiet as a mouse.'—This was done in a moment, and Miss Stacey bundled my clothes under the bed after me. She then opened the door, and, sure enough, my mistress entered the room, saying, 'I am sorry to disturb you, my dear; but I am so unwell I cannot sleep. I have got such nervous feelings that I am really afraid to be alone.'—'Had I not better call up one of the servants and send for the doctor, my dear madam?' asked Miss Stacey, her voice trembling; I could well conjecture why.—'No, thank you, dear,' answered the lady; 'if you have no objection, I will pass the remainder of the night with you.'—'Oh! with pleasure, ma'am,' exclaimed Miss Stacey. 'I will accompany you to your room directly.'—'We may as well remain here,' replied Mrs. Beaumont; and it struck me that there was something strange in the way that she spoke. Miss Stacey urged that it was very injurious for persons in delicate health to change their beds; but Mrs. Beaumont declared it to be a mere prejudice. Miss Stacey invented some other frivolous excuse, and I suppose that this confirmed Mrs. Beaumont's suspicions; for she immediately exclaimed, 'Really, one would suppose that you wished to get rid of me, Miss Stacey!'—'To speak candidly, my dear madam,' was the reply, 'I can't bear sleeping with another person.'—'Indeed!' said Mrs. Beaumont. 'Hey day! what shoes have we here? Why, surely these cannot be your's, my dear?'—I have noticed that the more spiteful ladies are together, the more they '*dear*' each other.—'It must be some oversight on the part of one of the servants,' said Miss Stacey, in a faint tone.—'It's very strange!' cried Mrs. Beaumont; and I heard her stoop down and take up the unfortunate shoes. Oh! how I did shiver and tremble! and how sincerely I wished both the amorous ladies at the devil at that moment! But matters grew speedily much worse; for, in stooping down to pick up the shoes, Mrs. Beaumont had spied my trowers; and these she fished up in another moment. Miss Stacey shrieked; Mrs. Beaumont raised the drapery hanging round the bed to the floor—and, behold! by the light of the candle which had been left burning in the room, she discovered unfortunate me!

"I cannot tell you what a scene ensued. Mrs. Beaumont raved like a mad-woman, and Miss Stacey protested her innocence. The house was alarmed—the other servants came down to the door—and Mrs. Beaumont's reproaches and upbraidings, levelled against Miss Stacey and myself,

made every thing known to them. I scarcely know how I had pluck enough to play the part which I did play; but it is, notwithstanding, a fact that I was resolved to screen Miss Stacey, and throw all the scandal on Mrs. Beaumont. I accordingly begged to be allowed to explain; and when I could obtain a hearing, I swore that Mrs. Beaumont had given me a sovereign, and promised me another to sleep with her—that I had mistaken the room—and that the moment I had seen Miss Stacey enter and perceived my error, I had managed to creep under the bed, unnoticed by her. Mrs. Beaumont went into strong hysterics at this accusation, and was conveyed away to her own apartment by the female servants, while I hurried off to my own room. You may suppose that I scarcely slept a wink all the remainder of the night. I knew that I had lost both my place and my character—but I felt satisfied in having done all I could to screen poor Miss Stacey, though it did not strike me at the time that my version of the business could not possibly be taken as a very probable story. Next morning the butler came up to me very early, and in a long, humbugging speech, assured me that, out of good feeling towards me, Mrs. Beaumont had consented to keep me in her service, and look over the affair, if I would confess the truth. I however persisted in my original statement, and displayed the sovereign that Mrs. Beaumont had given me. The butler went away, telling me not to leave my room until he came back. Half an hour passed before he returned, and again he tried to argue me into his views; but I was obstinate, and the interview ended by his desiring me to pack up my things and leave the house directly. This I very willingly agreed to, and in a few minutes my preparations were complete. 'Where are you going to, youngster?' asked the butler, when he had paid me the amount of wages due.—'I don't know,' was my reply.—'Well,' he said, 'I should advise you to take a room at the family washer-woman's. She has got one to let, I know; and if you hold your tongue about what has occurred in this house, I will try and get you another place.' I readily gave the required promise, and also followed the advice relative to the lodging, in which I was installed in another half hour.

"In the evening the butler came to me, and gave me the addresses of several families in whose service pages were wanted. 'You will have to apply to the butlers at those houses,' he said, 'and therefore you can refer them to me. I will endeavour to make it all right for you, as I should be sorry to see a promising young lad ruined for want of a character.' I thanked him very much, pretending to see nothing but pure friendship in his conduct, although I was quite enough experienced in the ways of the world to understand that Mrs. Beaumont herself had instigated this lenient treatment as a means of sealing my lips. I ventured to ask him about Miss Stacey, and he at once told me that she had left the house at a very early hour in the morning. I longed to enquire if he knew where she was gone, but dared not. On the following day I called at the various addresses which the butler had given me, and was not considered suitable at any. At one I was thought too young—at another too old; here I was too short—there I was too tall. In fact, the objections were trivial, but fatal. I was returning to my lodging along Great Russell

Street, Bloomsbury, when I saw in a shop window a notice that a livery boy was wanted, and that applications were to be made within. I entered the shop, and received the address of a house in the same street. There I went, and was shown into a small parlour, where I was kept waiting for nearly a quarter of an hour. At last a gentleman and lady—an elderly couple—entered the room, and I was immediately subjected to no end of questions, all of which I answered in the most satisfactory manner, because I did not hesitate to say 'Yes' when an affirmation was required, and 'No' when a negative was necessary. At last the gentleman said to the lady, 'Well, my love, what do *you* think?'—'What do *you* think, my dear?' asked the lady.—'I think, my dear—' began the gentleman.—'So do I, Mr. Turner,' exclaimed the lady, without waiting to hear what her husband *did* think. It however appeared that they perfectly well understood each other; for the lady, turning towards me, said, 'We will give you a trial if the butler at your last place speaks as well of you as you assure us he will. But you will have to be very active here, for I must tell you that this is a boarding-house—'.—'A boarding-house of the highest respectability,' interrupted the gentleman, looking very solemn indeed, as if he was afraid that I was going to say I didn't believe him.—'And there are many ladies and gentlemen to wait upon,' continued Mrs. Turner: 'but we shall see.' I then withdrew. Mr. Turner went about my character in the evening, and found every thing satisfactory; and next day I entered my new place, wondering what adventures would befall me here.

"This boarding-house proved to be the hardest place I ever was in. I had to get up at five in the morning to clean six pairs of boots and ten pairs of ladies' shoes. If they did not shine well, I was blown up on all sides; and if I did make them shine well, Mrs. Turner blew me up for wasting the blacking. Then I had to bees-wax heaven knows how many chairs and tables, and to clean the windows from top to bottom at least twice a-week. In the middle of my work I was constantly interrupted by knocks at the door, or errands to run upon. Then at meal-times something was always wanting—something had always been forgotten. The cleaning of knives and plated forks and spoons would have alone been a good four hours' work for a strong man. If I did them properly and devoted time to them, I was scolded for being slow and lazy: and if I knocked them off in a hurry, they were sure to be found fault with. Sometimes the bells of half a dozen rooms would ring in the morning, when the boarders were getting up, all at the same instant; and if I was long in taking up any particular gentleman's hot water to shave, or any lady's shoes, I was certain to hear of it when Mrs. Turner came down into the kitchen. In fact, it was a hard life, and an unthankful office; for when I did my best, I could not give satisfaction; and yet the cook and housemaid—the only servants kept besides myself—were candid enough to declare that I was the best lad that had ever been in the house during their time.

"There was one elderly lady—a Miss Marigold—who seemed to have taken a particular hatred for me; and only because when, one day, she began to caress me in the same way that Mrs. Beaumont and Miss Stacey had done, I laughed in her face and

told her to keep her wrinkled old hands to herself. From that minute she grew desperately malignant against me, and was always finding fault. I determined to have my revenge, and waited patiently for the opportunity. That occasion came at last. One evening Miss Marigold retired earlier to bed than usual; and Mrs. Turner rang for me in the parlour. I went up and found my mistress alone. 'John,' she said, 'go directly with this box,'—pointing to a round paste-board one on the table—'to the hair-dresser's, and tell him that you will call for it at eight precisely to-morrow morning. Then, in the morning, when you come back with it, send it up by the housemaid to Miss Marigold's room.'—I took the box, which was tied round with string, and was particularly light. It immediately struck me that it must be Miss Marigold's wig: for I was convinced she wore one. Accordingly, as I went along the street, I stepped up an alley; and by the light coming from the window of a house, unfastened the strings to peep inside. Sure enough, it was Miss Marigold's wig. It immediately struck me that her going to bed earlier than usual was only an excuse to be able to send her wig in time for the hair-dresser to do it up that night; and this circumstance, joined to the fact that she wanted it the very next morning, convinced me that Miss Marigold had but one wig belonging to her. I therefore resolved that some accident should occur to the wig before it went back to her; but in the meantime I took it to the hair-dresser. He seemed to understand what it was; for without opening the box, the strings of which I had carefully re-fastened, he promised me that I should have *the article* when I came back in the morning, shortly before eight.

"I must now inform you that there was an elderly gentleman at the boarding-house, whose name was Prosser. Captain Prosser he was called; and a jovial kind of old bird he was too. He was amazingly fond of breaking out now and then, staying away all night, and coming home between six and seven in the morning, so precious drunk that he could not see a hole through a ladder. But he was always sensible enough to know that he must not make a noise; and when I let him in on these occasions, he would put his fore-finger by the side of his nose in such a comical fashion, as much as to say, 'Don't let any body know it!' that I could scarcely keep from laughing. Well, on this very night, when the affair of the wig occurred, the Captain went out for a spree; and it happened that he came home rather later than usual the next morning. I had just returned with the wig-box, and had it still in my hand, when the Captain's low sneaking knock at the door summoned me to open it. He came in worse than I had ever seen him before: he could scarcely keep upon his legs, and his head rolled about on his shoulders just as if he had no bones in his neck at all. His hat, too, was smashed completely in; and his coat was slit completely up the back to the very collar. Such a comical figure I never saw in my life. He staggered into the hall, seeming quite to forget where he was, or what he wanted there. A thought struck me, and I resolved to put it into execution. He was so uncommonly drunk, and yet so quiet and tractable, that I saw I could do with him just as I liked: so I led him into the parlour where the long table was laid for breakfast; but no one had come down yet. I seated him on the sofa in such a way that he could not fall

off, and in a few moment he was in a sound sleep. I removed his hat, took the wig from the box and fixed it all awry upon his head, purposely tumbling all the curls, so as to make it appear as if he had thus adorned himself with his own hand. I then stole away from the room; and, having suffered about ten minutes to elapse, so as to bring the time nearer to breakfast before the exposure should take place, I went into the kitchen to tell the housemaid that there was a box in the parlour which she must presently take up to Miss Marigold. But she, not knowing what the box might contain, waited a few minutes more to finish something that she was about; and I did not choose to hurry her. At last Miss Marigold's bell rang; and I laughed in my sleeve to think that the poor lady would vainly wait for her wig. The housemaid hastened to answer the summons, and I followed her as far as the parlour, under pretence of taking up some plates for the breakfast-table. But just before we reached that room, seven or eight of the boarders, ladies and gentlemen alike, came pouring down stairs to breakfast; and the moment they entered the parlour, such screams of amazement burst from the women, and such roars of laughter from the men. The housemaid hurried into the room, and I behind her; and almost immediately afterwards came Mr. and Mrs. Turner, and all the rest of the boarders, except poor Miss Marigold!

"And what a sight burst upon their view! The screams and the roars of laughter had awoke Captain Prosser; and he was sitting, propping himself up, in the corner of the sofa, and looking stupidly about him, as if quite unconscious of where he was, and certainly ignorant of the reason which drew all eyes upon him. Such a comical spectacle as he was, with the wig perched all crooked upon his head! At length the ladies began to give vent to their indignant feelings. 'Shameful!' said one.—'Well, I never!' cried another.—'And *this* in a respectable boarding-house!' exclaimed a third.—'It all comes of having such a monster as the Captain in the place!' observed a fourth.—'But whose wig is it?' cried one of the gentlemen, a humorous fellow in his way; and, approaching the leather box, he took it up. 'MISS MARIGOLD!' at length he exclaimed, his eyes catching some writing in the inside.—Mrs. Turner, who had suspected the ownership of the wig, declared that she should go into hysterics; but her husband begged her not to do any thing of the kind; and so she followed his advice. Of course no suspicion fell upon me. When questioned, I said that I had brought home the box without knowing its contents; that I had put it on the sofa; and that before I had gone down stairs to tell the housemaid to take it up to Miss Marigold, I had opened the front door to let in the Captain. The thing was therefore clear:—the Captain had come in, in a state for which he ought to be ashamed of himself; and nothing would please him but he must decorate himself with poor Miss Marigold's wig! Such was the explanation agreed upon by all present; and while two or three of the gentlemen conveyed the Captain up to his own room, the wig having been previously removed from his head, Mrs. Turner went up to break the fatal news to Miss Marigold. To make an end of this part of my story, I need only say, that Miss Marigold left the house on the sly the moment her wig was done up again by the hair-dresser; and Mrs. Turner easily persuaded the

ladies to forgive the Captain, on condition that he would stand a dozen of wine—which he did.

"Several months passed away after this incident without any adventure worth relating. It was a most unpleasant place; but there was amusement in it; and moreover there was a certain love-affair in progress, in which I felt interested, and the end of which I was determined to wait and see. Not that I was an actor in it at all; but only a go-between. The fact was, that amongst the boarders there was a widow-lady, of about seven or eight and twenty—a very pretty woman, whose name was Percy. There was also a young gentleman of very effeminate appearance, but possessing a handsome—or rather a beautiful countenance, and a very slight figure. He was also short—a complete doll of a man; for he was within four years as old as the widow. His name was Hulse. This couple fell in love with each other: or rather, I think, the love was all on the side of the young gentleman, who possessed some little property and better prospects, whereas the widow was notorious as a husband-hunter ever since she had been in the boarding-house, and was moreover very poor. She was however sweetly pretty; and she had such wicked eyes that it gave me strange sensations to meet her looks. It was in this way that I came to know of the love-matter existing between Mr. Hulse and Mrs. Percy. About the time when the adventure of the wig took place, Mr. Hulse one evening asked me to give a letter privately to the widow-lady; and he slipped half-a-crown into my hands. You may have already seen that I possessed no small degree of curiosity, and I longed to know what that letter could possibly contain. I took it up into my own room with me, and tried to catch a glimpse at the writing inside; but it was so carefully folded that I could not. At last, to my joy, I perceived that the wax was stamped with a seal which was invariably left lying in the ink-stand drawer in the parlour, for the general use of the boarders. I therefore hesitated no longer to open the letter, breaking the wax as carefully as possible. The letter was a declaration of love, the writer stating that he had not courage to make the avowal in words; and he implored a written answer, observing that the lad John was to be trusted, as he seemed a quiet steady youth. I was much amused by the letter, and early next morning I re-sealed it by means of the stamp in the ink-stand drawer: then, watching the opportunity when Mrs. Percy descended to breakfast, I gave it to her as she was coming down stairs. In the evening she put into my hands an answer, accompanied by a shilling for myself; and as she smiled significantly, and showed her pretty white teeth, I felt that I could do any thing to obtain a kiss from that sweet mouth. Fortunately this letter was also fastened with the house-seal, and I was therefore able to read its contents. It thanked Mr. Hulse for the favourable opinion he had entertained of her, and stated that she felt she could love him, but that she required a more explicit avowal of his intentions. This letter I re-sealed and gave to the young gentleman. A reply was ready in the evening; and another half-crown was slipped into my hand. This letter I likewise read, and found that Mr. Hulse professed the most honourable intentions, but begged that their engagement (should the correspondence have that result) might be kept

a secret, as he had an uncle (from whom he had considerable expectations) to consult, but who was at present abroad and would not be in England again for several months. The lady's answer, which also passed through my hands, was quite satisfactory; and in the course of a few days I saw that the tender pair exchanged significant looks when they thought themselves unperceived, and that Mr. Hulse was gradually losing much of his bashfulness. Nevertheless frequent notes passed between them, and several presents were made to the lady by the young gentleman, all of which went through my hands and were duly inspected by me. It may seem strange that two people living in the same house should require the aid of a go-between; but such was the fact—for I believe Mr. Hulse to have been one of the very sentimental and romantic class of lovers who are fond of mystery and of tender correspondence.

"This absurd courtship went on for several months; and the lovers little suspected that I was as well acquainted with its progress as themselves. At length I perceived by one of Mr. Hulse's letters that his uncle was expected home in a few days, and he spoke of the necessity which would compel him to go on a visit to the old gentleman, but also expressed his hopes that the result would be according to the wishes of the lady and himself. And in less than a week he did depart on the proposed visit, having previously exchanged most tender and affectionate letters with the widow. The very next morning a new boarder arrived—a gentleman who in every respect was quite different from Mr. Hulse. He was tall, largely-made, and wore a great deal of hair about his face. Without being handsome, he was a very fine man; and he talked away at a rapid rate, getting on good terms with all the other boarders by the time breakfast was over, and very intimate indeed before the cloth was removed after dinner. He sat next to the widow, to whom he paid great attention; and she appeared very well satisfied with his civilities. In fact, in one single day he made more progress in thrusting himself into the good graces of Mrs. Percy than Mr. Hulse had done in a week. The name which the gentleman bore at the house was Jameson; but I did not believe it to be his right one, because his hat had the initials of F. S. in it; the same letters were marked, as I heard from the housemaid, on all his linen; and they were also described by means of brass nails on the lid of his trunk. However, a few days passed; and I saw that Mr. Jameson and Mrs. Percy were becoming more and more intimate. They sat together at meals—they lounged together on the sofa in the drawing-room—and, as I watched them narrowly, I saw that they exchanged glances which convinced me that Mr. Hulse had been forgotten by the faithless lady. Somehow or another I took an immediate hatred to Mr. Jameson, the moment he set foot in the house; and this feeling was increased by his harsh and commanding ways towards me. I was moreover sorry for Mr. Hulse, who had been kind and generous in his behaviour to me; and I longed to do Jameson some evil turn. The opportunity arrived sooner than I expected; for one morning—about a fortnight after he had arrived at the establishment—I was accosted in the street, when going on an errand, by an ill-looking fellow who was loitering about, and who said he wanted to speak to me particularly. I asked him

his business; but he would not exactly explain it. He however said he was very anxious to learn some tidings of a certain gentleman, and that he had received a hint of the person alluded to being at a boarding-house in Great Russell Street, under a feigned name. It instantly struck me that the gentleman thus enquired about was Jameson; and I was moreover convinced, by the appearance of the enquirer, that he had no good intentions towards the individual whom he was seeking. I therefore readily gave such information as convinced the man that Mr. Jameson was the person he was looking for; and I then learnt, to my astonishment, that this Mr. Jameson's real name was Frederick Shawe! I now showed myself so much interested in the affair, and expressed myself in so hostile a way relative to Mr. Frederick Shawe, that the man at last admitted to me that he was a sheriffs'-officer's follower, and had a writ against the man who, I was convinced by all I now heard, was the same that had treated my deceased parents in so scandalous a manner. We did not part before we came to an understanding together; and I returned to the boarding-house, overjoyed to think that the moment of vengeance was not very far distant.

"The dinner-hour was five o'clock; and on the day of which I am speaking, there was company present besides the boarders. Mr. Jameson, as usual, sat next to Mrs. Percy; and his attentions were of the most amiable description. Had Mr. Hulse returned at the moment, he would not have been very well pleased at the way in which she received them. But a storm was brewing over the head of the successful rival; and I was longing for it to burst. Towards the close of the meal Jameson asked me for a glass of porter. I pretended not to hear him, and waited on some one else. He called me again; and when I at length drew near his chair to serve him, he said in a harsh voice, 'You're very neglectful, John; and I wonder how Mrs. Turner can keep such a stupid boy in the house.'—'Then why don't you ask her to discharge me, Mr. Shawe?' I said.—You should have seen how he turned—first as white as a sheet, and then as red as scarlet.—'Mr. Jameson, you mean, John,' exclaimed Mr. Turner. 'Call gentlemen by their proper names, and don't be rude, sir, or you shall leave the house directly.'—'I did call *this gentleman* by his proper name, sir,' I answered: 'and that name is Shawe.'—'The poor boy is labouring under a mistake,' said Shawe, dreadfully confused and stammering as he spoke; 'but don't be harsh with him: he did not intend any harm.'—'I do not want *you* to speak in favour of me, sir,' I exclaimed; 'and perhaps you'll guess why, when you know that my name is *Jef-freys*.'—The villain's countenance now showed the most awful dismay; and the scene produced great excitement amongst all present. But at that moment, a knock at the front-door was heard; and I ran to answer it, well knowing who were there. How my heart beat with joy when I admitted the officer and his follower (the man I had seen in the morning) into the house; and, without caring how my master and mistress might take it on my part, I threw open the dining-room door, led the officers in, and, pointing to the person they wanted, said, '*This is Mr. Frederick Shawe!*' The officers instantly arrested him; and a scene of extraordinary confusion followed. Mrs. Turner fainted in right earnest, and while several of the ladies flocked

round her, others began tittering and whispering, and Mr. Turner requested Mr. Shawe to pay his bill before he went to prison. But the conduct of Mrs. Percy was the most extraordinary part of the whole performance. It is, however, most probable that she acted in the way she did to conceal her vexation and annoyance. For, bursting out into a loud laugh, and casting a look of contempt at the man with whom she was on such good terms a few minutes before, she expressed her surprise that '*fellows of his stamp* should dare to force their way into *genteel society*.'—To be brief, Mr. Turner could not get the amount of his claim on Shawe, whose trunks he accordingly detained; and the scoundrel was conveyed away by the officers. I followed the party to the street-door, and took good care to let Shawe know that it was I who had betrayed him. The exposure of this person caused such a sensation in the house, that my share in it created a feeling of curiosity; and, when questioned by Mr. Turner before all the company, I explained how he had treated my parents, so that I was rather praised than blamed for what I had done. But Mrs. Percy applauded me the most, and spoke warmly in my favour—at which I was very much pleased.

"Two or three days after this occurrence, Mr. Hulse returned—but only for a few hours; and during that time he was alone with Mrs. Percy in the parlour. The nature of their interview was soon known throughout the house; for it appeared that the news he had brought from his uncle were favourable, and their engagement was now no longer kept secret. It was fortunate for the widow that he did not remain in the boarding-house until their marriage; for, if he had, some kind friend would have been sure to tell him of the flirtation that had gone on between herself and the scoundrel Shawe. As it was, every thing turned out well: Mr. Hulse took and furnished a nice house in Bloomsbury-square, and in a few weeks he and Mrs. Percy were married. My former services were not forgotten by either; but, on the contrary, were rewarded on the wedding-day by a guinea from the gentleman and half that sum from the lady. I had thus seen the end of this very extraordinary courtship, and being thoroughly tired of my place, began to look out for another. I accordingly made the usual enquiries, and heard of several vacancies. My very first application was successful, and I was engaged by the Honourable Mr. Ilverton, Mr. Turner giving me a good character and expressing no dissatisfaction at my desire '*to better myself*'.

"The Honourable Mr. Ilverton resided in St. James's Square. He was a gentleman of about forty years of age, and was on the point of marriage with a lady much younger than himself, and who was one of the numerous daughters of the Marquis of Mountcharlton. But as Mr. Ilverton was very rich, and the Marquis was but a poor peer, the match was considered a very desirable one by the friends of Lady Hortensia Stanhope. I heard my fellow-servants in my new place say that she was a very beautiful creature; and I longed to see her; but six weeks were yet to elapse before the celebration of the marriage. The place was a very nice one; and the establishment was on a large scale. There were six female servants, and four men, besides the butler and coachman. Two of the footmen were constantly on duty in the hall

that is, they had nothing to do for the four hours that their turn lasted, but to look out of the hall-windows, and attend the front-door. When their four hours expired, the other two took their place for a like interval. There was a great deal of aristocratic feeling amongst these servants. The butler had *his* room, and the housekeeper had *her* room; and they took their meals apart from the rest. The other servants were obliged to say '*Sir*' to the butler, and '*Ma'am*' to the housekeeper. The cook and the two housemaids were likewise above the kitchen-maids, who said '*Miss*' when addressing either one of them. The footmen also considered themselves above the coachman; but they allowed the latter to take his meals at their table. As for myself, I was looked upon as a mere child by the men; and probably by the women too—for they were very much addicted to fondling me when I happened to be alone with either one of them.

"Well, the six weeks passed away; and the day came on which Mr. Ilverton was to be married. The ceremony was performed at St. George's, Hanover Square; and the 'happy couple,' as the newspapers always call new-married people, started off for Mr. Ilverton's country-seat. A fortnight elapsed; and then came the day when the town-mansion was to receive its new mistress, whom I had not yet seen. I remember the profound curiosity which I felt on that occasion, my fellow-servants, who had frequently beheld her, having spoken so high of her beauty. It was about six o'clock in the evening when they were expected to arrive, dinner having been provided for seven. I stationed myself in the hall to obtain as early a view as possible of Lady Hortensia Ilverton; and shortly after six the carriage drove up to the door. From the hall-window I saw her ladyship alight; but she had a veil over her face. I was, however, enabled to admire the beauty of her figure, which was very finely proportioned; and I thought, as she stepped from the vehicle, that I had never before seen such a charming foot and ankle. The loveliness of her form rendered me the more anxious to behold her face; and this curiosity on my part was soon gratified. For, on entering the hall, the lady threw back her veil;—but no words can explain the full extent of my astonishment, when I beheld the very same charming creature of whom I had once before caught a hasty glimpse at the doctor's house in Brook Street! A faint exclamation of surprise escaped my lips; no one however heard it—and I instantly mastered my feelings. Lady Hortensia passed through the hall, leaning on her husband's arm, without looking either to the right or to the left;—and as she did not therefore observe me, I had no opportunity of knowing whether she would remember me or not.

"It was a part of my duty to help to wait at table; and I longed for the dinner-hour to arrive, to clear up that point. At length my doubts were set at rest;—dinner was served up—the lady saw me; and I felt convinced that she had completely forgotten my face. I was not however quite a year older than when I saw her at the doctor's, and therefore not much changed: nevertheless, she evidently did not know me again. I really felt relieved on her account; for she was such a beautiful creature, and seemed so amiable, that I should have been sorry for her to have experienced any annoyance or vexation on my account. During the whole

of dinner, I took my station near her chair, and watched her attentively; and though she conversed pleasantly enough with her husband when he started a subject, or addressed himself to her, yet it struck me that she was not altogether happy—for she seldom commenced a topic of her own accord, but seemed rather to love silence; and I now and then fancied that she sighed in a subdued manner. I don't know when I ever felt a deeper interest in any one than I did in this lady; and it seemed to me as if I could do any thing to serve her. But I am afraid that I am tiring you with this long story;"—and Jeffreys abruptly broke off.

"Not at all, old fellow," exclaimed Tim the Snammer. "It's only just struck twelve by St. George's; and we don't mean to separate yet awhile."

"No—not quite yet, I should hope," observed Josh Pedler. "Besides I'm getting deucedly interested in that Lady Hortensia of your's. I all along expected that the beautiful young creature at the doctor's would turn up again somehow or another."

"To be sure," said Old Death. "it would n't be a regular romance if she did n't."

"It's all as true as gospel!" cried Jeffreys. "Do you think I could invent such a pack of curious adventures? If you do n't believe what I've told you already, I'm sure you won't believe what there is to come; and so I'd better hold my tongue."

"Now do n't be angry, my dear boy," said Old Death: "I was but joking. I like your story amazingly; so pray finish it. We're in no hurry, and there's plenty of drink."

Jeffreys accordingly complied with the solicitations of his comrades, and proceeded uninterruptedly to the end of his narrative.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF A LIVERY-SERVANT.

"I AM now going to take a leap of about six months in my story; because, during that time, nothing of any importance occurred in the establishment of the Honourable Mr. Ilverton. I may, however, observe that my suspicion relative to the unhappiness of his wife was confirmed the more I saw of her; for she was often dull and melancholy—and once or twice I saw that she had been shedding tears. Her husband was very kind and attentive to her; but he was a great deal from home, as he had large estates in the country which he was frequently obliged to visit, and he was also canvassing a borough for the approaching elections. Her ladyship preferred remaining in town, because she could then enjoy the society of her mother and sisters, who were almost constantly with her. Well, as I just now said, six months had passed away without any adventure of importance, and I was already wearied of the sameness of the life I was leading, when something occurred which tended to excite my curiosity and interest. It was about four o'clock, one summer afternoon that the little incident took place; and this was it. A letter came, addressed to her ladyship; and the hall-porter gave it to me to take up into the drawing-room. I went up stairs, and my hand was on the drawing-room door, when sounds of sobbing and low whispering, coming from inside, met my ears. I stopped and listened. 'My God! you know that I love you, Herbert,' said the voice of



Lady Hortensia, who no longer spoke in a whisper. —Then another voice made some reply which I could not catch; and several minutes passed in a whispered conversation, not one single word of which did I overhear. At last I could judge that the visitor was about to take his leave; and I entered the room, first making as much noise as I could with the handle of the door so as to warn those inside that some one was coming in. But a single glance was enough to show me that Lady Hortensia was in great confusion, while a tall, handsome, young gentleman who was with her turned aside and walked towards the window. They were both standing when I went in; but her ladyship seated herself the moment after I entered and passed her handkerchief rapidly over her charming face. I endeavoured to appear as if I saw nothing to excite my curiosity, handed my mistress the letter, and retired. I waited in the hall to catch another glimpse of the gentleman when he went out; and in a few minutes he took his departure. I asked the hall-porter who he was. 'I never saw him before,' was the answer; 'but I heard him desire the footman to announce him by the name of Mr. Herbert Remington.'—'Well,' thought I to

myself, 'Mr. Herbert Remington is a very fortunate man to be loved by such a beautiful lady.' But I did not breathe to a soul what I had overheard, nor any thing that I knew concerning my mistress.

"Mr. Ilverton was in the country at this time; and I now observed that Mr. Remington called regularly every day at about four o'clock. The other servants did not appear to notice it as at all extraordinary; but I had my own reasons for thinking a good deal on the subject. Several times, on the occasion of these visits, did I creep to the drawing-room door, and listen; and much of their conversation did I thus overhear. From that I gleaned that Mr. Remington and Lady Hortensia had been attached to each other for a long time; but that their marriage had been rendered impossible by his poverty. I also learnt enough to convince me that he was the father of a child of which she had been delivered at the doctor's house, but which had died a few hours after its birth. I felt no small degree of importance in knowing myself to be acquainted with all their secrets; and I considered myself not only bound to keep those secrets to myself, but also to assist them in any way I could, if an opportunity served to render my humble aid available.

And the time to put me to that test soon came. Mr. Ilverton returned home from the country much sooner than was expected; and the servants, when talking together in the kitchen, said that he had come back in a very queer humour. He was, however, more amiable than ever with her ladyship at dinner on the day of his return; and I saw nothing to prove the truth of what I had heard down stairs. Lady Hortensia retired early that evening, saying she was unwell; and her maid observed on returning to the servants' hall, after attending on her mistress in her bed-chamber, that her ladyship appeared very unhappy. Then for the first time did the servants speak of the constant visits of Mr. Remington; and as they talked on the subject, suspicions seemed to spring up in their minds. But the entrance of the housekeeper put an end to the gossip; and soon afterwards the drawing-room bell rang. I hastened up to answer the summons, and found Mr. Ilverton walking up and down the apartment in so excited a manner that he did not even notice my entrance. At length he perceived me; and, throwing himself in a chair, beckoned me towards him. 'John,' said he, laying his hand on my shoulder, and speaking in a strange tone of voice, 'I think you will tell me the truth, if I ask you a few questions.'—'I said that I would.'—'And will you keep to yourself whatever I am going to say to you?' he asked.—'I will, sir, certainly,' was my answer.—'I thought you were a good and discreet lad,' he continued, putting a couple of sovereigns into my hand: 'act as you ought towards me, and you shall never want a friend. Now, tell me, my boy, whether a gentleman named Remington has called here every day during my absence this last time?'—'Not every day, sir, I should think,' was my reply; for I saw that a storm was brewing, and felt determined to screen my mistress as much as possible.—'Yes, but he has though,' returned Mr. Ilverton sharply; 'you may not, however, have observed it,' he added immediately afterwards, in a milder tone: 'now answer me truly my next question; and do not be afraid that I shall be angry, or shall say anything about it if you reply in the affirmative. Do the servants talk amongst themselves of Mr. Remington's visits?'—'I have never heard a word said on the subject, sir,' was my answer.—'Then I am not laughed at in that quarter!' he muttered to himself; but I heard his words plain enough, although he seemed to forget that he had spoken them a minute after they had left his lips. 'John,' he continued, his fingers actually gripping my shoulder, 'you can do me a great service if you will; and I will reward you handsomely.'—'It is my duty to do all I can for you, sir,' I replied.—'Yes,' he said; 'but what I now require is something out of the way of your ordinary duties, and is rather the part of a friend, than a servant towards a master.'—'I will do any thing I can, sir, to oblige you,' I exclaimed.—'And you will swear solemnly not to breathe to a soul a word of all that now takes place between us, or that you may have to do for me, unless I call upon you to proclaim any thing in a court of justice.'—'I will obey you in all things, sir,' I replied.—'You are a good lad,' he said; 'and I am not mistaken in you. To tell you the truth,' he continued, 'I have received an anonymous letter, creating the most painful suspicions in my mind. This letter assures me that a gentleman whom I do not know, and whose name is Remington, is a too frequent visitor at this

house. But before I act, I must be satisfied that his visits are injurious to my honour. Do you understand me, my boy? You see, I am obliged to be open and candid with you, as I require an important service at your hands.'—'I understand you perfectly, sir.'—'What, then, do I mean?'—'Why, sir, that my lady should not receive that gentleman's visits so often, and while you are away,' I answered, pretending first to reflect for a few moments.—'Exactly so!' he cried. 'And now I will explain what I require of you. To-morrow at about half-past three o'clock,' he continued, 'I will give you a letter addressed to some friend of mine at a little distance; and you must tell the butler you are going to take it, and that you shall be upwards of an hour away. By these means you will not be missed by the servants. But, instead of leaving the house, you must steal up to the drawing-room, and conceal yourself under the sofa. There must you lie as quiet as possible, and listen to all that may take place between Lady Hortensia and Mr. Remington, who, not knowing of my return, will be sure to call at his wonted hour.'—'But suppose, sir,' I said, 'that I should be discovered?'—'Then leave it to me to extricate you from the difficulty, which is not likely to arise,' answered Mr. Ilverton.—'But,' I again argued, 'if her ladyship should happen to come down earlier to the drawing-room than usual, how shall I be able to conceal myself beneath the sofa?'—'Should this occur, I will devise some means to induce Lady Hortensia to quit the room for at least a few minutes, at about half-past three. Be you on the watch.'—'I will sir,' was my answer.—'And if you serve me faithfully, John,' he added, 'you will find a friend in me; but if you disobey me in one single point, I will find means to punish you somehow or another.'—I, of course, made all the necessary promises; and he dismissed me, apparently well satisfied with my assurances of fidelity.

"I slept but little all that night. I saw that a dreadful storm hung over the head of my mistress; and I lay awake, planning a thousand schemes to avert it. It was very easy for me to lude myself under the sofa; and, whatever I might overhear, afterwards assure my master that not a word had been said which he could possibly be angry at. But I was experienced and cunning enough to fear that Mr. Ilverton wanted a witness; and that though I might be listening under the sofa, he would also be listening at the door, and would burst into the room in case his suspicions respecting his wife should receive confirmation. Even if he should not adopt this plan, but merely use me as a means of ascertaining whether his wife was faithful or not, and take my word respecting the particulars of the anticipated interview between herself and Mr. Remington,—nevertheless, I saw the necessity of warning my mistress that such suspicions did exist concerning her, and put her fully upon her guard. This I resolved to do; and at last I made up my mind to speak frankly to her next day. But when that day came, I saw no chance of having an opportunity of carrying my intention into effect;—for her ladyship did not come down stairs to breakfast nor to luncheon, she being still indisposed, as I heard from her own maid. I loitered upon the landing near the drawing-room as much as I dared; and once or twice, when my master went up or down stairs, he nodded approvingly of my conduct,

thinking that I was there only to serve his interests. At last, just as the clock had struck three, to my joy I saw Lady Hortensia descend from her own chamber, and enter the drawing-room. Not a moment was to be lost. I rushed in after her, closed the door, and said, 'My lady, listen to me for one instant, I implore of you.' She looked at me with mingled surprise and anger; for my manner must have appeared not only strange, but also boisterously rude. I am sure I do not recollect now—for I did not remember ten minutes after this scene occurred—what words I used, or how I introduced the subject; but it is very certain that I told her how I was the very lad who had seen her at the doctor's; how her husband had bribed me to watch her; how I was determined to warn her of the plot in progress against her; and how I would do any thing in the world I could to serve her. She seemed perfectly astounded at all I told her: she sank on the sofa, turned red and white a dozen times in a minute, and then burst into tears. I dared not say a word: the idea of a poor servant like me venturing to console a great lady like her was ridiculous. But I was in a dreadful state of alarm lest Mr. Ilverton should come in.—'John,' she said at last, wiping away her tears, 'if all you have told me is true, you are one of the best lads that ever lived. But how am I to know that this is as you represent it?'—I understood what she meant: she feared lest it was only a trap to ensnare her into something amounting to a confession.—'My lady,' I answered, 'if I wished to injure you, could I not have at once revealed to Mr. Ilverton all that took place at the doctor's house in Brook Street?'—'True!' she said, blushing scarlet. 'Yes—you are faithful!' and she put her purse into my hand. I returned it to her, declining to take any reward; but she forced it upon me, and I was compelled to accept it. 'Now retire,' she said hastily; 'and follow your master's bidding in respect to concealing yourself. I shall afford you an opportunity,' she added: then, turning away, she again burst into tears.

"I hastened from the room, well pleased with the success of my interview with her ladyship, and feeling myself so important a person that I scarcely knew whether I stood on my head or my heels. The secrets of the family were in my keeping,—in the keeping of a boy not sixteen years old; and it was enough to make me proud. Besides, I felt so satisfied with my conduct in respect to her ladyship, that it seemed to me as if I had done a great and a glorious deed. Well, on quitting the drawing-room, I went up to my own chamber, to compose my feelings; for I was really so much elated as to be quite unfit to meet my master for a few minutes. But at the expiration of that time I hastened down stairs, received the letter which he had in readiness for me, and, after looking in at the servants' hall for a moment, just to say I was going out on an errand, stole up to the drawing-room, where I found no one. I therefore thrust myself under the sofa, and awaited anxiously the termination of the adventure. Just as the time-piece on the mantel struck four, her ladyship returned to the room; and almost immediately afterwards Mr. Remington was announced. Hasty whispers were exchanged between them in a language—most likely French—which I did not understand; and then they seated themselves on chairs at some distance from each other,

Lady Hortensia having previously rung the bell. I was surprised at this proceeding: what could she possibly mean? But I was more astonished still, when, on the entrance of one of the footmen, she said, 'Ask your master if he will have the kindness to favour me with his company for a few minutes.' The servant retired to execute this command; and I was now frightened lest her ladyship intended to accuse her husband of his stratagem, and thereby expose my want of faith towards him. But second thoughts convinced me that this was not the case; because her ladyship must remember that it was in my power to ruin her effectually if she meditated any treachery towards me. A few minutes elapsed, during which Mr. Remington and my mistress conversed on the most common-place subjects—such as the weather, the new opera, and so on; and at length Mr. Ilverton entered the room. 'I am sorry to disturb you, my dear,' said Lady Hortensia, speaking in her most amiable manner, 'since I know that you are so fully engaged with election matters and other important business; but I have a favour to ask of you. This gentleman is Mr. Remington. Mr. Remington,' she added, 'Mr. Ilverton,' thus calmly and quietly introducing them.—I do not know how my master looked, but I could fancy that he felt very queer: at all events, he said nothing.—'Mr. Remington, my dear,' continued Lady Hortensia, speaking with a tranquil affability that quite astonished me, 'is a gentleman to whom our family are under the greatest obligations; for it was he who saved my brother Edward's life at Oxford a few years ago.'—'I remember to have heard that your brother Edward had a narrow escape from being drowned in the river on a boating excursion,' said Mr. Ilverton; 'but I was not until now acquainted with even the name of the gentleman who so generously risked his life to save him.'—'It was a deed which scarcely deserves such warm praise, sir,' observed Mr. Remington.—'On the contrary, Mr. Remington,' exclaimed Lady Hortensia, 'Mr. Ilverton must, as my husband, experience the same gratitude which I feel towards you, and ever shall, for your noble conduct.'—'Certainly, most decidedly,' exclaimed my master, who, I could very well suppose, was now feeling particularly sheepish.—'And I am convinced, my dear,' continued her ladyship, addressing herself altogether to her husband now, 'that you will approve of certain steps which I have taken in order to convince Mr. Remington of the gratitude of the near relatives of him whom he saved from a premature death. Mr. Remington has a sister who has been left a widow, and who is anxious to turn her accomplishments to a good account. She is desirous of entering some family as a governess; and I have supplied Mr. Remington with letters of introduction on behalf of his sister to several of our friends and acquaintances. He has this day called to inform me of his sister's success in obtaining the situation she requires, by means of one of those letters.'—Mr. Ilverton expressed his entire approval of this proceeding on the part of her ladyship; and Mr. Remington rose, and took his leave in that formal manner which seemed to show that he did not even pretend to be considered in any other light than a mere acquaintance.

"When he was gone, Lady Hortensia said, 'I am really glad that I have been able to serve that young man's sister, for they are both very poor, it seems

and the service which he rendered our family in saving the life of my brother was not one that should have gone unrewarded.'—'Oh! decidedly not, my love,' said Mr. Ilverton. 'But will you accompany me to the library now, and see the new picture that I bought some weeks ago, and which has been sent home this morning? It was kept to be framed.'—'Certainly,' answered Lady Hortensia; and she quitted the room with her husband. I of course understood that he had purposely enticed her away to allow me an opportunity of leaving my hiding-place; and I was very glad to get from under the sofa, where I was most terribly cramped, not having dared to move, and scarcely able to breathe free through fear of being heard. I was highly delighted at the clever manner in which Lady Hortensia had got herself out of the serious scrape that for a time seemed to threaten her with total ruin; and I was heartily glad to think that her husband must be thoroughly ashamed of having exposed himself so completely to me. At dinner-time Lady Hortensia gave me a glance which seemed to thank me again for the part I had acted towards her; whereas Mr. Ilverton never once looked me in the face—not even when I was close by his side and he ordered me to serve him with any thing. Shortly after dinner her ladyship retired to the drawing-room; and the moment I was alone with my naster, he beckoned me to approach him, and said in a low tone, 'John, what took place between your mistress and that gentleman before I came in?'—'Mr. Remington said he came to thank her ladyship for her kindness towards his sister,' I answered, taking my cue from what I had heard before; and then her ladyship said that you was at home, sir, and she would introduce Mr. Remington to you.'—Then I have been altogether misled, John,' he observed: 'and mind that you never breathe a syllable of what has passed to a living soul.'—'Certainly not, sir,' I replied. He put a couple of sovereigns into my hand, telling me I was a good boy, and repeating his injunction of strict secrecy.

"I was now a very great favourite with both my master and mistress, though, in each other's presence, they neither showed any particular kindness towards me. Mr. Remington came no more to the house; but her ladyship now and then gave me letters to put privately into the post for her, and which were addressed to him. Thus three months more passed away; and the general election came on. Mr. Ilverton went out of town; and he had not left the house an hour, before Lady Hortensia gave me a note to convey by hand to Mr. Remington's lodgings in Sackville Street, with directions to wait for an answer. Mr. Remington seemed greatly delighted at the contents of the note, and gave me the reply, which, in his hurry and joy, he omitted to seal, although he had lighted a taper on purpose. I hastened away, and went into a public-house to read the letter. To my surprise I found, by its contents, that an appointment had been made for the lover to pass the night with Lady Hortensia, she having already admitted her maid into her confidence, thereby arranging for his admission into the house at twelve o'clock. I was now dreadfully annoyed, at being no longer treated as a confidant, I who had done so much to protect them from exposure! My interest in behalf of my mistress suddenly turned to hate; and I thought seriously of revenging what I considered to be a slight. I

however ran back to Mr. Remington's lodgings, and said to him, 'Sir, you have not sealed this letter; and I would rather not take it like this to her ladyship, for fear she should think I had read it, which I would not do for all the world.'—He looked very hard at me, and seemed dreadfully confused at his oversight; but, perceiving that I did not change colour, and that I met his gaze steadily, he was more satisfied. Having sealed the letter, he returned it to me, putting half-a-guinea into my hand; and I then hastened away with it to my mistress, from whom I received double that sum. But a wonderful change had come over my mind. I saw that I was made a mere tool of; whereas so long as I thought myself important as a confidant, I was happy. I had moreover hoarded near twenty pounds, by means of the presents I had received; and I thought how foolish I was not to turn my knowledge of certain secrets to account, and extort a good round sum from her ladyship. In a moment I grew avaricious and spiteful. I know how it was: while my vanity was flattered, I was contented; but the instant I saw that I was a tool, and not a confidant, I was mortified, and therefore changed. It did not strike me then that delicacy would of course prevent Lady Hortensia from making use of me to give admittance to her lover; and I looked on myself as a person badly used. I did nothing that day; but I lay awake during the best part of the night settling in my mind how I should proceed. Thus, while the lovers were in each other's arms—as I had no doubt they were—a storm was brewing against them in a quarter from which they little expected it.

"The very next day I went into the drawing-room when I knew that her ladyship was there alone, and, shutting the door, advanced in a resolute manner towards her. She seemed astonished, and asked me what I wanted. 'A hundred pounds,' I answered in a dogged style.—'Do you mean to request that sum as a favour, or to demand it as the price of the secrets you have promised to keep faithfully?' she said in a mild and reproachful way, which made me more than half repent of my conduct; but I had gone too far to retreat.—'Which ever your ladyship likes,' I replied.—'I will give you two hundred if you will leave the house this minute, and let me make what excuse I choose for sending you away,' she said.—The offer was too tempting to be rejected; and I immediately accepted it. Two hundred pounds! it was a fortune, and I fancied that I should never be able to spend it.—'Pack up your boxes, and prepare to depart,' said Lady Hortensia, 'If the servants ask you any questions, steadily refuse to answer them, beyond merely stating that I have ordered you to leave immediately; and if you will call on Mr. Remington this evening at eight o'clock, he will give you two hundred pounds in gold.'—I was overjoyed at this arrangement, and gladly took my departure on such terms, caring little what reason her ladyship might allege for the abruptness with which I left. Two hundred pounds to be received in a few hours! Oh! how happy I was!—and what castles did I build in the air! I removed my trunk to a public-house in St. Martin's Lane; and having had a pint of wine to celebrate the occasion, strolled out to purchase new clothes—for I had of course left my livery at Mr. Ilverton's house, and was not overwell dressed. Having bought all I required,

thereby making a considerable hole into the twenty-five pounds which, with my boardings and wages, I had in my pocket when I came away, I returned to the public-house, and put on my new things. I then went out again to while away an hour till eight o'clock, it being now seven. As I was going along Piccadilly, I saw an elegantly dressed lady step out of a carriage at a shop-door; and to my joy I recognised Miss Stacey. She immediately knew me; and, seeing me so well attired, did not hesitate to stop and speak to me. We conversed together for a few minutes, during which I told her that I was no longer under the necessity of working for my living, as fortune had been kind to me. She expressed her pleasure, gave me her address, and asked me to call upon her; telling me, however, that I must be sure to come between two and seven, and at no other time. I promised to visit her; for she looked sweetly pretty and very amorous;—and we parted.

"Precisely as the clock struck eight, I knocked at Mr. Remington's door,—none of your sneaking single knocks; but a good loud double one—for I felt all the importance of a man who has two hundred pounds to receive. Mr. Remington was at home, and I was shown up into his room. He desired me to be seated; but in a very cold tone and with a haughty manner. I did not however care one fig for that: the idea of the two hundred pounds rendered me as independent as possible. When I sat down, Mr. Remington rose from his chair; and, advancing close up to me, he said in a low, savage tone, 'You are a contemptible villain!'—'I did not come here to be abused,' I exclaimed insolently: 'give me my money, and let me be off.'—'Your money, indeed!' he cried: 'not one farthing will you receive of me, or of Lady Hortensia Ilverton. Now, listen, young man, and be cautious how you act. Had you conducted yourself fairly, you would always have found friends in me and her ladyship; but you have shown yourself a villain, and we are determined to crush you at once. You think you have us in your power; but you are mistaken. Her ladyship has already stated to her entire household that you were discharged suddenly for an atrocious attempt to extort money from her: and say but one word of scandal, utter one syllable against her, and you will be handed over to justice. Begone, sir; and take care how you conduct yourself. One word, by the way, before you leave me—aud that is a word of friendly warning. The hall-porter in St. James's Square has instructions to give you over to the care of a constable, if you present yourself again at that mansion.'—'You cannot bully me,' I exclaimed; 'I know too much! Every thing shall now be made known to Mr. Ilverton.'—'And he will not believe a word you utter,' answered Remington. 'This night's post bears to him a letter in which Lady Hortensia declares that you threatened to expose both him and her if she did not give you a sum of money; and that you dared to assert that her husband had bribed you to conceal yourself under a sofa. She of course pretends to think her husband incapable of such mean and cowardly conduct; and he will be sure to deny it; at the same time he will never forgive nor believe you.'—'But there is the affair at the doctor's house in Brook Street,' I cried.—'The doctor will deny that such a lady was ever there,' returned Mr. Remington, with a triumphant smile.—'And the

maid who knows that you passed an entire night with her mistress?' I said, my courage sinking rapidly.—'You had better ask her what she knows of the business! Now, mark me, young man; every precaution is taken to put you to confusion. You are forestalled in every possible way. Say what you will, positive contradictions and denials will meet your assertions; and the result will be to your transportation for life, for attempting to extort money! Now, then, reflect well before you plunge yourself headlong into difficulties.'—'But I am thoroughly ruined!' I exclaimed, tears starting into my eyes, as I saw the truth of all he said. 'I have lost my place and my character!'—'It is your own fault,' replied Mr. Remington. 'At the same time,' he added, after a few moments consideration, 'I do not wish you to be crushed completely down to the very mire. I will give you one chance. Sign a paper, stating that all your accusations are so many falsehoods, and that you make this acknowledgment to save yourself from being handed over to justice; and I will then present you with fifty guineas.'—Thus speaking, he took out a handful of notes and gold, to tempt me to conclude the bargain.—'But every thing I can state is true!' I exclaimed.—'Never mind *that*,' he answered: '*we* can prove it to be all false. So, haste and decide: my time is precious.'—What could I do? I wanted money, and I saw that he was determined to resist all attempts at positive extortion. I therefore expressed my readiness to sign the paper, which was already drawn up; and, having done so, I received the fifty guineas promised.—'Now,' said he triumphantly, as he folded up the document and placed it in his pocket-book, 'you know the consequence of a single slanderous whisper!'—I took my departure, terribly nettled, but still somewhat consoled by the possession of the fifty guineas; for I thought that one third of the sum at first expected, was better than none at all.

"I longed to be revenged on Lady Hortensia and Mr. Remington; but I knew not how. I smarted dreadfully under the treatment I had received;—I uttered bitter words against my folly in consenting to leave the house before I had the money paid down; and I pondered on a thousand different ways of venting my spite on my enemies. For several days I rambled about by myself, racking my brain with devices. At last I resolved to abandon the idea, at least for the present; and then I set to work to enjoy myself—or rather to see how soon I could make away with my money. A few weeks beheld the bottom of my purse—and I was astonished to think that so many guineas should have disappeared in so short a time. I was now seriously troubled what to do for a living; because I had no character. Suddenly I bethought myself of Miss Stacey's invitation, and hastened to call on her, it being then about three o'clock in the day. I found her living in elegant lodgings in Maddox Street: and she received me most kindly. I told her, word for word, all that had occurred to me since I last saw her; and she was equally candid with me. In fact, she was then in keeping by one of the Cabinet Ministers, who allowed her ten guineas a week, paid her rent, her milliner's and her wine-merchant's bills, and also the hire of her carriage. We soon came to an understanding together; she wanted a page, or tiger, just at that moment, and I accepted the post. The very next day I entered my new

place—the most comfortable I had ever yet been in, because I shared my mistress's bed nearly every night. But I soon discovered that the Cabinet Minister and myself were not the only persons who enjoyed the favours of Miss Stacey. Several gentlemen called during those hours when she knew there was no chance of her 'friend' making his appearance: in fact, the lady had become a regular wanton. It was not however for me to make any observations on her conduct: I was well satisfied with my place—and that was enough. I learnt from her that Mrs. Beaumont had died a few months previously, having just before married her butler, who came into possession of all her fortune and had set up as a gentleman, driving his cab and finding plenty of people to honour his champagne parties with their presence. Miss Stacey also gave me a little sketch of herself. She had been seduced, when only fifteen, by the husband of a lady with whom she was placed as companion; and she unhesitatingly admitted that in all the families where she had lived, she had maintained an intrigue with some one, either master, man-servant, or page. Since she had left Mrs. Beaumont she had been in keeping with the Cabinet Minister;—'but,' she added with a smile, 'you see that I am not particular where I take a fancy.' She was indeed a licentious woman, but very good-natured, and possessing a temper that nothing could ruffle.

"I had been with her about three months, when I saw in the newspaper an account of the sudden death of the Honourable Mr. Ilverton, M.P., who was found a corpse in his bed one night by the side of his wife. There was a Coroner's Inquest; and the verdict was 'Died of apoplexy.' I however had my suspicions that some foul play had been practised. In a little less than a year afterwards, I learnt, by the same channel of intelligence, that Lady Hortensia Ilverton had become the wife of Herbert Remington, Esq. About the same time I met Mrs. Hulse—the pretty lady, you remember, who played such pranks with her two lovers at the boarding-house. She stopped and spoke to me. I inquired after Mr. Hulse; and she said that he was quite well, and that they lived very happy together. I then asked her slyly if she had seen Mr. Frederick Shawe lately.—'What?' she exclaimed, 'do you not know all that happened to him?'—I assured her I did not.—'He committed a forgery some months ago,' she replied, 'and was hanged for it. It was down in the country; but I forget where. The whole account was, however, in the papers at the time.'—I was delighted to hear that the enemy of my parents had come to such a miserable end. Mrs. Hulse gave me half-a-sovereign, and bade me good bye.

"A short time after these little incidents, and when I had been in Miss Stacey's service nearly eighteen months, the Cabinet Minister suddenly withdrew his protection from her—I never heard why. It is however more than probable that her numerous intrigues reached his ears. The immediate result of the stoppage of funds in that quarter was a bolt from the lodgings, my mistress being over head and ears in debt. She removed to Norfolk Street, Strand: and I accompanied her. It was at this time that I was attacked by the small-pox, and obliged to leave. I went to the hospital, where I remained dangerously ill for several weeks; and, when I did recover, I was marked as you now see

me. I may therefore say without vanity, that before this unfortunate occurrence I was a very good-looking lad; and it was no wonder that the women used to take a fancy to me. Well, I left the hospital with only a few shillings in my pocket, which I had about me when I went in, and my first step was to enquire after my late mistress in Norfolk Street. But there I learnt a sad tale. She had been greatly reduced in circumstances, and had made away with the things in her ready-furnished lodgings. The landlady gave her into custody; she was committed for trial, and sentenced at the Old Bailey to transportation for seven years. But this sentence was commuted to imprisonment for two years, by an order from the Home Office, although the judge who presided at the trial declared it to be a most aggravated offence. I thought I could understand the secret of this leniency; nor was I mistaken; for, on calling upon my poor mistress in Newgate, where she was imprisoned, she told me that she had written to her late 'friend,' the Cabinet Minister, who had procured the alteration in her sentence. She was very happy, and made me promise to call and see her again. But I never had the opportunity; for some Member took up the case in the House of Commons, and asked the Home Secretary the reason why the original sentence was not carried out, seeing that the jury had given no recommendation to mercy, and that the judge had pronounced a strong opinion on the matter. The affair made such a noise, and the *Weekly Dispatch* took it up in such strong terms, that the Government was obliged to order the sentence of transportation to be put into immediate effect.* The consequence was that the poor lady was sent out of the country as soon as possible; and I never saw her any more. I felt for her deeply: she had been kind to me—and, with all her faults, there were many excellent points in her character. But, somehow or another, I never did meet a woman who, let her be ever so bad, had not some redeeming qualities. I have met hundreds of men so thoroughly bad, that they had not a single thing to recommend them: but it has not been so in my experience with the other sex. I do not believe that any woman can become so utterly depraved, as not to retain a little amount of good feeling about her. I wish I could say as much for men.

"But let me make haste and bring this story to an end. I was now a miserable, friendless wretch in the world, and knew not what to do for a living. I had no character, and could not get a place. At last, when driven to desperation, I resolved to call on the person whom Mrs. Beaumont married, and who was for many years her butler. I accordingly went up to Russell Square, and knocked at the

* This incident is founded on fact. Many of our readers will doubtless recollect the case of J—N—and her mother, who were convicted of robbing ready-furnished lodgings about ten years ago. Miss J—N—had been the mistress of a noble lord who was a Cabinet Minister at the time of the condemnation of her mother and herself, and who is a Cabinet Minister at the present moment. The affair created a great sensation at the time; but the *Dispatch* and other independent newspapers took it up; not in order to persecute the unhappy women, but on public grounds. The result was that the original sentence passed upon them, and which Ministerial favouritism sought to commute to a much milder penalty, was carried into force. The entire business, so far as the noble lord was concerned, was vile and scandalous in the extreme.

well-known door. A servant in splendid livery answered the summons; and I was shown into the hall, where I was kept waiting for nearly two hours. At last I was shown up into the drawing-room, where the ex-butler lay lounging on the sofa, reading the *Morning Post*. 'Just sit down, young man, for a moment,' said he, with an affected drawl, although he was an old fellow of sixty, 'while I finish the *Fashionable Intelligence*; because, you see, I'm interested in it.'—So I took a seat, and was kept waiting for another half-hour. At last the gentleman laid aside the paper, and enquired my business. I told him who I was, and how distressed was my position. He stared at me for a long time, as if to make sure that I was really the John Jeffreys whom he had once known—for I was cruelly disfigured; and when he was convinced that I was no imposter, he gave me half-a-guinea, saying that he had been a looser by the late Derby, and had lent his friend Lord Mushroom so much money lately, that he could do no more. I thanked him very sincerely and went away. I walked on to Great Russell Street, being in the neighbourhood, and called at the Turners' boarding-house. But I learnt from the servant that Mr. Turner was dead, and Mrs. Turner had declined business in consequence, and would see nobody. I went away with a heavy heart; for I knew that the half-guinea would not last for ever. At length I was so tired with walking about, that I entered a public-house to get some refreshment. Two men were sitting in the parlour, drinking ale; and their conversation, singularly enough, happened to turn on a friend of their's who, as I heard them say, had just got a situation as footman in a good family.—'But how the devil did he manage, though?' asked one; 'since he only came out of quod for stealing that plate, you know, ten days ago.'—'Why, he got a character of that chap who lives at the house with the balcony, up in Castle Street, Portland Place, to be sure,' was the answer.—'You do n't mean old Griffiths, do you?' said the other.—'Of course I do,' replied his friend: 'he's been in that line now for the last six months, and makes an excellent thing by it. I've recommended several poor devils of men-servants to him.'—'The deuce you have!' I exclaimed: 'I wish to God you would recommend me?'—'Are you out of place and got no character?' demanded the man.—'Just so,' I answered; 'and if I don't get a situation soon, I shall starve.'—'Have you got any tin about you?' asked the man.—'Ten shillings, when I've paid for what I've had,' I replied.—'That 'll just do the trick!' cried the man: 'you must stand a pot to me and my friend here; and you'll have to pay seven-and-sixpence entrance fee to old Griffiths. Then you'll have a tifle left to take you on till to-morrow.' I readily paid for a pot of the best ale; and when we had disposed of it, I received a note of recommendation to the Mr. Griffiths spoken of. He was an old, respectable-looking man, with a bald crown, and grey hair at the back and sides of his head; and he was sitting in a neat office, with a large book before him. He read the note, which explained my business, and then demanded the entrance fee. This I paid; and he put down my name in the book. 'I will give you the addresses of several families who require a young livery-servant,' he said; 'and you may refer them to Captain Elphinstone, No. —, Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square. You may say that you lived with that gentleman for three years, and only left him on account of ill health. And now

I must tell you the nature of the bargain which exists between you and me. You are sure to obtain a situation; and when your first quarter's wages are paid, you must bring me a sovereign; and a sovereign from second quarter. You will then always have me as your friend, and need never be afraid of remaining long out of place. But if you do not keep faith with me, I shall find means to make you repent it.'—I assured the old gentleman I would do the thing that was right; and took my leave of him, rejoiced at the prospect of obtaining a situation.

"Next morning I made myself as tidy as I could, and called at the places pointed out by Mr. Griffiths. I was soon successful, and gave Captain Elphinstone as my reference. The gentleman of the house said he would call on the captain in the course of the day, and I was to return in the evening for the answer. This I did, and found that an unexceptionable character had been given of me. I was therefore admitted into the gentleman's service at once. It was a quiet place, and a small establishment, only consisting of myself and two female servants—a cook and housemaid; for Mr. Farmer, our master, was an elderly bachelor. There I stayed for several years, and was very happy and comfortable indeed. But one day Mr. Farmer took it into his head to marry the cook; and as she could not bear to have in her house the same people who had known her as a fellow-servant, the housemaid and myself both got our discharge. We, however, had good characters, but we did not avail ourselves of them—for, having each scraped up a little money, we agreed to club our savings, and open a shop in the chandlery line. We had long been intimate enough to render the parson's services quite unnecessary in enabling us to live together; and so we commenced business, passing ourselves off as man and wife. The thing did not, however, succeed; and care drove me to the public-house. It was then that I met you, Mr. Bones; and you suggested how much good might be done if I would go back into service, and give you notice of any little things worth your knowing. This I resolved to do; and, leaving my female companion to do what she liked with the shop, I took leave of her. We parted very good friends; and by the aid of old Griffiths I very soon obtained a place. I need not say any more,—unless it is that since then I've been in situations at many houses, and have generally managed to do a pretty decent amount of business with Mr. Bones."

Jeffreys ceased speaking; and his three companions expressed the amusement they had derived from his narrative.

A few more glasses of grog were drunk, as well as a few more pipes smoked; and it was not until past three in the morning that Old Death's visitors left him.

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We cannot close this chapter without a few observations relative to that large and important class—domestic servants.

And first of female servants. It is said that great numbers of them are immodest, and that from their ranks the class of unfortunate women, or prostitutes, is largely recruited. We believe that the immorality of female servants is considerably exaggerated by these representations, and that the cases of frailty are the exceptions and not the rule. There are thousands and thousands of females amongst this class as respectable and well conducted as women ought to be, and who

take a pride not only in maintaining a spotless character, but in so behaving themselves that there shall be no chance of its becoming tainted. And this is the more creditable to them—the more to their honour, inasmuch as the temptations to which they are exposed are very great. Sent out on errands at all hours—compelled to go to the public-houses to fetch the beer and spirits for the use of the family—constantly placed in contact with the serving-men belonging to the family's tradesmen—exposed to the chance of sustaining insulting liberties at the hands of the visitors to the house—and often persecuted by the lustful addresses of some male inmate of the establishment, such as a brother or son of the master, and perhaps the master himself,—what strength of mind—what moral courage must the servant-maid possess to resist these temptations and escape from so many perils! We mean to say, then, that if she do fall, there is far more scope for pity and a far greater amount of extenuation on her behalf, than on that of the lady who surrenders herself, unmarried, to the embraces of her lover!

And in many—too many instances—what a life of slavery is that of the female servant!—and how little enviable is the lot of the poor maid-of-all-work! Talk of the hard fate of the negress—think of the hard fate of the maid-of-all-work! Excellent saint of Exeter Hall! you need not send your sympathies travelling some thousands of miles across the sea: there is plenty of scope for their exercise at home, if you be really sincere—which we know you are *not*! Look to the maid-of-all-work—up at five in the winter, and heaven only knows when in the summer,—compelled to keep an entire house neat and decent—to black all the boots and shoes—to run on all the errands—to put herself in awful peril by standing or sitting outside the window which she is compelled to clean—and very frequent half-starved by those whom she serves so assiduously and so faithfully,—what a life is hers! *

* We avail ourselves of the opportunity afforded us by the glance which we are taking at this subject, to recommend to personal an admirable little work, written by our esteemed and talented friend, Mr. John Taylor Sinnett, and entitled "The Servant Girl in London." It is published by Hastings, Carey Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and is a little book which should be found in all families, as it contains sentiments and precepts useful alike to the employer and the employed.

In a work from which we have frequently quoted in the Notes belonging to the present Series of "The Mysteries of London,"—we allude to "Poverty, Mendicity, and Crime,"—we find an important passage bearing strongly upon the subject of the text. It runs as follows:—"We must now direct attention to the class of female servants, and they form no insignificant number: from these the higher ranks of our prostitutes are recruited. Thirst for dress and finery, which has crept on to such a degree that it is not a very rare sight to behold them waiting on their mistress in the morning, bedecked in silks and ornaments equal to the young ladies themselves, even where the ladies are of the highest class of the community. Great censure is due to ladies, especially those who are mothers, for not restraining their servants from squandering away the whole of their money, loss of place ought to be the consequence of not laying by a small portion of wages to sustain themselves in the event of illness or other unforeseen calamity; the dress of a female servant ought to be good, but perfectly void of ridiculous ornament and frippery. The ladies' maids of our aristocracy are a race the most highly culpable of their sex, aping all the pride and airs of their lady, and desiring to appear abroad with equal *éclat*, to effect which, the wardrobe of the mistress is not unfrequently resorted to, and the purse not always held sacred, or she becomes a prostitute whilst under the roof of her employer, till descending from one false step to another she at length links her fate to some favourite of the swell mob, to whom she at first listened as a suitor, and ends in her being accessory to robbing the family

Female servants are treated with much greater kindness in France than in England. In the former country they are considered rather in the light of humble friends of the family than as mere slaves, which is the

which had fostered her. It is ascertained, beyond doubt that most of the houses that are robbed, arises from the connexion and intimacy which the servant has contracted with some of the petty workmen who have been employed about the premises, many of whom are thieves themselves, or connected with some gang of villains who resort to that expedient to learn what property is kept on the premises, and how it is disposed of at night. 'A great deal of crime,' says Mr. Nairn, in his evidence, 'is generated in consequence of the tradesmen who employ journeymen to work for them, in gentlemen's houses, not taking care to inquire into their character: by getting acquainted with servants, they get a knowledge of those parts of the house where any thing valuable is kept. A number of men that were in the prison were painters, plasterers, and bricklayers, they were in the practice of communicating with thieves, and it is in that secret manner that they get information where property is kept.'—*Vide J. H. Nairn, p. 370, 2nd Report, Lords, on State of Gaols, 1835*

"There is a most infamous conspiracy existing between the purveyors or housekeepers of the aristocracy and their tradespeople, the latter paying the former a large per centage on the bills for the sake of 'gaining their custom.' Twenty per cent is often given, and it has been known to rise as high as fifty; unfortunately, the nobleman considers it as derogatory to his high rank to look into his pecuniary domestic affairs; but taking it in a moral point of view, it is his duty to do so for the sake of preventing this species of peculation, which is an absolute theft and one of the stepping-stones to crime generally, as the money so attained is mostly as lightly spent, and the servants out of place for a length of time, the difficulty to procure the wherewithal to keep alive their former extravagance makes them not hesitate to become regular thieves, the fine sense of honesty having been destroyed by the transaction with the tradesman, who had not failed, in his turn, to make out a bill more than sufficiently long to cover merely his generosity in bestowing Christmas boxes upon the domestics of his patron. These tradesmen are a rank disgrace to their more honest fellow-shopkeeper; they are worse than fences, and it is greatly to be regretted that a complete *expose* cannot take place, and all such tradesmen dealt with according to their merit.

"Another evil in society that is pregnant with mischief is giving a false character to servants, which ladies are constantly in the practice of doing, to avoid being plagued, or 'perhaps,' as they say, 'insulted by the discarded servant,' whose character, if correctly stated, would not be such as easily to procure a new situation, thus a pilferer having once had the luck to start off in a private family with a good name, is from this shameful habit left loose upon the public to commit his depredations at leisure and convenience, with the chance of blame falling upon an honest individual, through the crafty machination of the wicked. By making servants conscious that they would only procure such a character as they really deserve, great good would accrue to the public generally, and the servants themselves would be taught to curb their temper and other bad propensities, by which they would become infinitely more contented and happy beings, and valuable members of society.

"It is too often the case that servants are looked upon as little better than slaves, and so to treat them. To say the least of such conduct it is unwise, for in proportion to the kindness with which they are treated, so will they study in return to make us enjoy numberless little comforts so delightful to experience, and which it is in their power to give life to or destroy. Humanity ought to suggest that the situation in which these persons are placed, witnessing nightly those scenes of pleasure, without being permitted to join in them, is sufficiently grating, for they all have their feelings, in common with the best of us, and it ought to be one of the first cares of the heads of families to lighten, as far as consistent with the rules and shades of society, the state and labours of their dependants. In France the servants are in an enviable condition compared with those of England, and if the plan were followed in this country, giving them their little pleasures, many a one, whose propensities were wavering, would be confirmed in virtue, and become a useful member, instead of a disgrace to society."



estimation in which they are usually held, we are sorry to say, in the British Islands. Let them be treated with kindness and forbearance: they have much to try their patience and sour their tempers by the very nature of their condition and the miscellaneous character of their avocations. A man or a woman who is unkind to a servant, is a wretch deserving obloquy and execration. But a master or a mistress who, through petty spite or sheer malignity, refuses to give to a discharged servant the good character which such servant may in reality deserve, is a very fiend, unfit to remain in civilised society.

Before we take leave of this subject, we cannot resist the opportunity of expressing our opinion relative to a practice adopted at Court: we mean the fact of the Queen being waited upon in her private apartments by ladies of high rank and good family, instead of by female servants. Who is Queen Victoria, that a Duchess must select her gown, and a Marchioness hook it? Is she a goddess that a Countess must help her to put on her shoes, and a Baroness tie them? Must not royalty be touched by the hands of a female servant? Alas! we strongly suspect that Queen Victoria is a woman made of the same flesh and blood as the most ordinary mortals: and we feel confident that the practice of at-

taching ladies of rank and title to her august person is as pernicious to her, as it is degrading to the ladies themselves, and as flagrantly insulting to the entire class of well-conducted ladies'-maids. But royalty in this country must be idolized—deified: no means must be left untied to convince the credulous public that royalty is something very different from commonalty. This delusion shall, however, be dispelled;—the people must be taught to look on Victoria as nothing more than the chief magistrate of the country, deriving her power from the nation at large, and holding it only so long as the majority of the inhabitants of these realms may consider her worthy to retain it. The contemptible farce of firing cannon to announce her movements—of illuminating dwelling-houses on her birth-day—of cheering her whenever she appears in public, just as if she cared two figs for the bawling idlers who gaze on Majesty with awe and astonishment,—all this miserable humbug should be abolished. *The more a Sovereign is deified, the more the people are abased.* Instead of the nation being obliged to Queen Victoria for ruling over it, Queen Victoria ought to be very much obliged to the nation for allowing her to occupy her high post. For the only real *sovereign power* is that of the people; and the individual who looks on

royalty as something infallible—divine—supernally grand and awe-inspiring, is a drivelling, narrow-minded idiot, unworthy of the enjoyment of political freedom, and fit only to take his place amidst the herds of Russian serfdom.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE BLACKAMOOR.

UPON quitting Old Death's abode, Tim the Snamer and Josh Pedler proceeded together in the direction of Blackfriars Bridge; while John Jeffreys, having wished those worthies "good night," pursued his way up Horsemonger Lane, and plunged into the maze of narrow, obscure streets lying at the back of the prison.

Although he had said "*good night*" to his companions, it was in reality *morning*; for the clock of the gaol chimed a quarter-past three as Jeffreys passed by that dismal-looking establishment.

Having reached the door of the house in which he lodged, and which was in one of the streets above alluded to, he drew a pass-key from his pocket, and was about to apply it to the lock, when the sounds of footsteps close by fell upon his ears, and almost at the same moment a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder.

The conscience of Mr. John Jeffreys was not quite so free from sources of alarm as to prevent him from being painfully startled by this occurrence; and turning suddenly round towards the individual who had thus accosted him, he found himself face to face with a blackamoor.

"Fear not—no harm is intended you," said the negro, in a deep, solemn, and sonorous voice, but without the least peculiarity of accent; "that is," he added, "if you follow my directions."

"And who are you?" demanded Jeffreys, reassured by the certainty that he was addressing no myrmidon of the law.

"It is not for you to question, but to answer," said the Black in a cool and authoritative manner which seemed to indicate the consciousness of possessing the power to enforce his will, even against any resistance that might be offered. "But I have no time to waste in unnecessary discourse. You must accompany me whither I shall lead you."

"And if I refuse?" asked Jeffreys, trembling he scarcely knew why.

"Then I shall summon to my aid those who are ready at hand, and who will carry you off by force," calmly replied the Black.

"But if I raise an alarm," said Jeffreys, gradually yielding to a sensation of awe in the presence of the mysterious stranger who spoke with the confidence of power and authority, "the neighbours will come to my rescue, and —"

"A truce to this argument," interrupted the Black, sternly. "If you accompany me of your own free will, it will be to your advantage, and no harm shall befall you; but if you venture to resist me, I shall unhesitatingly make you my prisoner by force; and we shall then see what account John Jeffreys can give of his long and intimate connexion with Old Death."

"I will go with you—I will do any thing you command," said the villain, trembling from head to foot. "Only —"

"Again I tell you that you have nothing to fear and much to gain," observed the Black; and taking Jeffreys' arm, he led him hastily back towards Horsemonger Lane, neither of them uttering a word as they thus hurried along.

The night—or rather morning, was dark and sombre, and there were no lamps in the streets which they were threading. Thus, although arm-in-arm together, Jeffreys could obtain but a very imperfect view of his companion's features: nevertheless, it struck him that though the stranger's countenance was black as that of an African negro, the facial outline was not characterised by the protuberant thickness of lips and hideous flatness of nose which usually belong to that race. But Jeffreys was too much alarmed—too much bewildered by the sudden and mysterious adventures which had befallen him, to be able to make any very steady reflections; and whenever he threw a furtive glance towards his companion's countenance, he was instantly met by eyes the pupils of which seemed to glare upon him from their brilliant whites like those of a basilisk.

It was, indeed, an awe-inspiring and most uncomfortable situation in which Jeffreys found himself placed. Having numerous misdeeds upon his conscience, he shuddered at the idea of coming in contact with the law; and if he offered any resistance to his strange companion, such contact was the alternative with which he was menaced. But who was this strange companion? who was this Black that spoke with a tone of authority, and acted in a manner denoting a consciousness of power? For what purpose was he now hurrying Jeffreys along through the darkness of the silent night? and whither were they going? Even had the man been armed with conscious innocence, his position was one calculated to engender acute suspense, painful doubt, and wild apprehension;—but, knowing that he had been guilty of many deeds any one of which would be sufficient to involve him in serious trouble with regard to the law, the miserable wretch had every thing to fear, and scarcely any thing to hope.

It was true he had received assurances that no harm should befall him; and that the incident would, on the other hand, prove advantageous to him. But the influence of those assurances was completely absorbed in the vague and terrible alarms which the dread mystery of the adventure was so well calculated to excite. Conscious guilt made him a complete coward; and his ideas became so confused—his nervousness so great—his excitement so wild, that he began to fancy he was in the power of some unearthly being of evil nature and design. As this impression grew stronger in his attenuated mind, he cast in his terror more frequent glances at his companion;—and now it seemed as if the black countenance were rapidly changing—becoming hideous to behold, and lighted up with eyes that burnt in their sockets like red hot coals!

John Jeffreys felt his legs failing beneath him—his brain whirling—his reason going;—and he was on the point of falling to the ground, overcome by the terror that oppressed him, when his companion's voice suddenly broke upon his ear, dispelling all the superstitious portion of his alarms, and recalling him to his senses.

"Step in!" said the Black;—and Jeffreys found himself by the side of a hackney-coach which was waiting beneath the wall of Horsemonger Lane gaol.

He obeyed the command issued in that authoritative tone which he dared not resist; and the Black followed him into the vehicle, which immediately drove away.

"I must now blindfold you," observed the mysterious stranger; "and I warn you not to attempt to discover the road which we are about to pursue. Even in the darkness which prevails in this coach, I shall be able to distinguish all your movements."

"Where are we going?—what are you about to do with me?" asked Jeffreys, in an imploring voice.

"If you are such a coward as you now seem to be, you will prove of little service to me, I am afraid," said the Black, as he fastened a handkerchief over his prisoner's eyes. "Cheer up, man," he added, in a tone not altogether free from contemptuous disgust: "if I meant to deliver you into the hands of justice, for your numerous misdeeds, I should not take this round about manner of accomplishing the task. Once more I tell you that the result of this adventure depends wholly and solely on yourself. It may prove a fortunate occurrence for you, if your conduct be such as to beget confidence and merit forbearance and protection."

"Then you wish me to do something for you?" said Jeffreys, considerably reassured by the words just addressed to him.

"A great deal," was the laconic answer. "But we will not continue the discourse at present, if you please."

This intimation was followed by profound silence; and the vehicle rolled along at a rapid rate. Jeffreys was now so far relieved of the oppressive fears which had recently paralysed his intellectual energies, that he could even smile at the superstitious alarm which had seized upon him; and he endeavoured to follow in imagination the route pursued by the coach. But he soon became aware that it was taking such a circuitous and tortuous way as fully to destroy all possibility on his part of instituting any clue to its course; and he at last threw himself back in the vehicle, to give way to reflections on another subject—thus abandoning the idea of studying the direction in which he was being hurried along.

For an hour did the coach proceed, making numerous turnings into fresh streets, and often appearing to retrace the way it had previously pursued. At length it stopped; and, one of the doors being immediately opened, the Black took Jeffreys' hand and assisted him to alight. The mysterious guide then hurried his prisoner into a house, up a flight of stairs and into a room, where he conducted him to a seat.

"Remove the bandage from your eyes," said the Black.

This command was instantly and cheerfully obeyed; and Jeffreys, casting a rapid glance around, found himself to be in a well-furnished apartment, of which he and his mysterious guide were the only occupants. The curtains were drawn completely over the windows; and Jeffreys had not the least idea of the locality to which he had been brought.

Opposite to him, but in such a manner that the light of the candles did not fall upon his countenance, sat the Black, whose person Jeffreys was now enabled to examine more narrowly than when they were walking arm-in-arm in the neighbourhood of Horsemonger Lane Gaol; and that survey showed

him a man of middle height, well-built, and dressed in good but plain attire. His features were too delicate to be of the negro cast: he had no whiskers, and his hair was of the glossiest jet and seemed to curl naturally. On the table near him lay a pair of pistols; and over the mantel-piece two swords hung cross-wise, beneath a formidable blunderbuss.

The Black allowed Jeffreys leisure to examine the apartment, probably with the view of convincing him, by the appearance of the weapons distributed about, that he was in a place where treachery could be punished in a moment, and that it would be prudent for him to resolve beforehand to accept any conditions that might be proposed to him.

After a short pause, the Black assumed an attitude significant of his intention to open the business of the morning's adventure.

"John Jeffreys," he said, in his calm but imposing manner, "I am well acquainted with all that concerns you; and I know your readiness to serve those who pay you well. Now, however well Old Death may have already paid, or may promise to pay you, for any thing you may have done or may have to do for him, I will pay you better. Do you choose to enter my service—my service exclusively, remember; because, in serving me, you can really serve none other?"

"You seem to know me well, indeed, master," said Jeffreys, assuming a familiar tone, now that he began to fancy the Black to be no better than he should be.

"Dispense with jocularity, sir," exclaimed the other sternly; and Jeffreys shrank from the severe look fixed upon him and the haughty manner which accompanied the words just uttered. "Look you," continued the Black,—"I may as well inform you at once that the companionship which you may expect to enjoy with me, will not be of the kind to which you are accustomed with such men as those from whom you parted an hour ago. If you serve me, you must become my slave: you must execute my bidding without even pausing to reflect on the motives which may instigate the commands I shall give you. You must consent to become a mere automaton in my hands—a machine that is to move only as I choose to direct. There will be no familiarity between us—no friendship. All will be enveloped in the strictest mystery; and you will often have to act without comprehending what you are doing, or the objects you are destined to accomplish. You will moreover be watched by invisible spies—at least by persons whose supervision you will not suspect; so that the least attempt at treachery on your part will be sure to meet with instantaneous punishment—and that punishment is death."

"I see nothing to object to, sir, in all that," said Jeffreys, now speaking in a respectful tone, "providing the advantages are as great as they ought to be."

"The advantages to you will be numense," resumed the Black; "and I will explain them. In the first place, there is nothing criminal in my service—nothing that can make you tremble when a stranger taps you on the shoulder. On the contrary, I will protect you even from the effects of the crimes which you have already committed, should they transpire by accident or by the treachery of any of your former accomplices. Your salary shall be liberal and regularly paid; and thus you

will be freed from those vicissitudes which make such men as you rich to-day and poor to-morrow. When the time shall come—which it must—that I no longer need your services, I will settle on you an income for the remainder of your days. These are the advantages which I offer you."

"If you only fulfil one tenth part, sir——" began Jeffreys, delighted at the prospects opening before him.

"I am not in the habit of promising more than I can perform," interrupted the Black laughingly. "If my service suits you, you enter it from this moment."

"I accept the terms with joy and gratitude," said Jeffreys.

"Good!" exclaimed the Black; and tossing a well-filled purse towards his new servant, he said, "There are a hundred pounds to confirm the bargain. One piece of advice I must give you:—indeed, it involves a condition on which I must insist; and this is, that you do not, through idle vanity, display your gold to those persons who may be likely to suspect that you have not come honestly by it. For you will not be able to give any satisfactory explanation; and I do not choose you to get into any difficulty just that I may have the trouble of getting you out of it again. Why I say that you will be able to give no satisfactory explanation relative to the source of your prosperity, is because you will not know who your master is—nor where he lives—nor any thing concerning him. You will have no one to refer to, in case you fall into difficulty: at the same time, I should hear of it, and would hasten to assist you, if you be worthy of my regard—if you deserve that I should care for your welfare."

"But how am I to receive your orders, sir, if I do not know where you live nor who you are?" inquired Jeffreys, his astonishment and awe increasing with every word that came from the lips of his new master.

"Shall not I know where you live?" said the Black, smiling for the first time since they had met: "and can I not come to you when I require your services? Will not the post convey my letters? and have I not messengers to dispatch to you? Leave all those matters to me; trouble not yourself relative to the means of communication between us: and ask no questions which do not bear upon the mechanical and even blind service which you are to devote to me. You will find me a good and liberal master, if you prove faithful, diligent, and sincere; but should you attempt to practise perfidy against me—should you deceive me in any one single thing, however trifling, I shall become a terrible and implacable enemy."

"I can have no interest in deceiving you, sir, considering all the advantages your service holds out," said Jeffreys: "and yet I should like to know a little more of the nature of what you will require at my hands—what I shall have to do, indeed."

"No—I will explain nothing," returned the Black. "I have already assured you that my service is safe, so far as the laws of the country are concerned, and that you will never be called upon to do a deed of which you need be ashamed—supposing that you have any shame in you. I say so, because I know that you have hitherto pursued your courses—that you have maintained a desecrated evil connexion with Benjamin Bones—and that perate crimes have taken place through your innumerable robberies not actually perpetrated by your instrumentality, if

hands. But if you remain in my service, I hope to render you a better man—I hope to see the day come when you will know what proper shame is, and will blush at many of the actions of your earlier years. Of this enough, however, for the present. I did not bring you hither to listen to moral lectures or sermons from my lips. Neither do I believe that precepts are of much benefit to a man who has pursued a long career of vice and error. Example does much more—but experience most of all. When you shall have learnt the value of good conduct and the advantage of fidelity to him whom you serve, you will see how far preferable it is to dwell without the fear of incurring the resentment of outraged laws than to lead an existence of harassing excitement produced by the perpetual dread of falling into the grasp of justice. But, again I say, of this enough. Do you still adhere to your desire to enter my service?"

"I do, sir," was the answer, delivered in a firm tone.

"I must then warn you," resumed the Black, "that though I exact the most complete fidelity from you—and though I should punish, in a terrible manner, the least perfidy on your part,—yet, in respect to others, you will often be compelled to exercise stratagem and practise plots which at first sight may appear treacherous. You will have to wage war, perhaps, against some of your old companions—to defeat their projects—even to betray their schemes. Are you prepared to agree to all this?"

"I am prepared to obey your orders in all things," was the reply.

"Without even questioning my motives?"

"That was a condition already imposed by you, and agreed to by me."

"And you will undertake never to breathe to a single soul a word relative to the secret service in which you are engaged? Remember," added the Black, hastily, "I merely mention this as a warning; because I should immediately detect any treachery on your part, and should not hesitate to punish it terribly."

"I wish you would at once put me to the test in some way or another, sir," said Jeffreys. "You seem to know all about me—but in what way you got your information, is of course a mystery to me. However, you do know me well—and, having that knowledge of me, I can perfectly understand that you do not feel disposed to trust to my bare word in any thing. Now give me something to do—put me on trial in some way or another—and then judge whether I am the man to serve a good paymaster, or not."

"You speak to the point—and I will at once put you to the test you solicit," returned the Black; "and mind how you reply to my questions—because, even were you to amuse me with deceptive answers now, in a few hours I should discover the real truth, and my vengeance would overtake you—aye, even in the midst of those companions whom I am about to ask you to betray. In a word, then, what was the nature of the business which took you and two other men to Old Death's lodgings last evening, and detained you there a great portion of the night?"

"One word, sir, before I answer the question!" exclaimed Jeffreys. "If I reveal to you every thing which took place between myself, those two men

and Old Death last night, will you not think that in the same manner I shall betray to them what is now taking place between you and me?"

"I have already told you that the greatest proof of faithful service towards *me* is to betray *others*," returned the Black; "and I have given you ample assurance that if you attempt to betray *me* to *others*, certain vengeance will overtake you."

"Then if you consider my treachery towards others as a proof of fidelity to you, sir," continued Jeffreys, "I am content to be put to such a test. You ask me what took place between Old Death, Tim the Snammer, Josh Pedler, any myself last night; and I will tell you word for word. A few weeks ago one Thomas Rainford was hanged at Horsemonger Lane gaol, and was buried in St. Luke's church-yard. To-night Old Death means to have the coffin dug up, and conveyed to the house of certain people named Bunce, in Earl Street, Seven Dials; to which house he himself will move to-day. It seems that this Rainford was the eldest brother of the Earl of Ellingham, against whom Old Death has a dreadful spite; and so he intends to have the body of Tom Rain taken out of the coffin, a rope put round its neck, and a placard on its breast, stating that the famous highwayman was the Earl's brother. The body is then to be conveyed to Pall Mall, and placed on the steps of the nobleman's house. This is one part of the scheme concocted last night, and which me and the two other men were engaged to execute."

"Go on," said the Black, in a low tone.

"The part that's to come is wiser than what I've already told you, sir," observed Jeffreys; "and I am afraid that if you know I consented to serve in the matter —"

"Go on—go on," exclaimed the Black, impatiently.

"Well, sir—since I must, I will tell you all," continued Jeffreys. "Old Death has found out that a lady, named Esther—Esther—I forget—"

"Never mind! Go on, I say," cried the Black, more impatiently than before.

"I was saying that Old Death had found out that this lady was the mistress of Tom Rain, the famous highwayman, and that the Earl has a great esteem for her. He has also heard that the Earl is going—or *was* going—to marry another lady, named Hatfield; and he has made up his mind to have these two ladies carried off and conveyed to Bunce's house in Seven Dials. When he has got them there, sir, he intends — But I really —"

"Go on, man!" exclaimed the Black. "What does he mean to do?"

"To put their eyes out," replied Jeffreys, in a low tone, and speaking with considerable hesitation.

"The fiend!—the monster!" ejaculated the Black, starting from his chair; but instantly composing himself, he resumed his seat, saying, "Was that the full extent of the atrocity planned and agreed upon last night?"

"That was the whole scheme, sir," answered Jeffreys. "Benjamin Bones agreed to give us each a hundred pounds for serving him in those matters, and he paid us each thirty on account."

"Show me your share," said the Black, abruptly.

Jeffreys hesitated, and turned pale.

"Beware how you deceive me—take care how you trifle with me!" exclaimed his master. "If you received those thirty pounds from Old Death,

you must have them about you now; for *I know*," he added emphatically and significantly, "that between the time you left his lodgings and stopped at your own door, whither I followed you expressly to ascertain where you lived, you entered no place at which you could have deposited the money."

Jeffreys no longer dared to hesitate; but taking a large roll of Bank notes and a quantity of gold from his pocket, he spread them upon the table, saying, "The thirty pounds I received from Old Death last night are amongst this lot."

"And whence did you obtain such a large sum?" demanded the Black, hastily glancing over the amount. "there are several hundreds of pounds here!"

"Well, sir," said Jeffreys, completely over-awed by the tone and manner of his new master, as well as by the mystery which surrounded him; "I will tell you all about it—and then you will be convinced that I am ready and anxious to secure your good opinion. I was until very lately in the service of a Mr. Torrens—"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Black, starting as if with sudden surprise at the information he had just received: then, again composing himself, he said in his usual calm, but authoritative manner, "Proceed."

"This Mr. Torrens was paid a sum of money a few days ago—about fifteen hundred pounds," continued Jeffreys; "and I put Old Death up to it."

"Benjamin Bones again—Benjamin Bones at the bottom of every villainy!" cried the Black, in an excited manner.

"Well, sir—and so Old Death sent two men—the very same men who was with me at his lodgings last night—to rob Mr. Torrens of the money. They succeeded, and Old Death changed the large notes into small ones and gold; because large notes are useless to such men as Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler. If they attempted to change a fifty pound note, they would get taken up in a moment; whereas they can manage to smash small notes at the public-houses where they deal. So Old Death had his share of the plunder; and mine is part of that heap. I have now told you every thing, sir—"

"No—not every thing!" said the Black, in a more serious and solemn tone than he had yet adopted during his interview with Jeffreys. "Mr. Torrens is in Newgate—charged with a fearful crime," he continued; "and his daughter Rosamond is in a state bordering on despair at the house of kind and generous people with whom I am acquainted."

"Good God! who are you?" exclaimed Jeffreys, surveying his master in terror and amazement. "You know every thing—every body! The least word that is uttered leads to a subject with which you are sure to be acquainted! Oh! sir—if you have had me brought here to do me a mischief—to get me into trouble—to make me confess things—"

"Fear not, Jeffreys!" interrupted the Black, in a re-assuring tone. "I am acquainted with Mr. Torrens' version of the history of that murder—and I know that suspicion rests not upon you. But I now perceive clearly that the tale which Mr. Torrens has told to his daughter, and which his daughter has repeated to those friends of mine who have granted her an asylum,—I perceive that this tale is, alas! too true, strange and incredible as it at first appeared. Yes: Mr. Torrens did not deceive his daughter! The house was entered by two men and

robbed, as he described the occurrence—and those two men were the real murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay! Jeffreys," continued the Black, in a lower and more measured tone, "you are now completely in my power. Nay—start not—fear not: it is far from my intention to harm you. But it is as well for you to know that you are now bound to me in two ways: first, because I pay you for your services—secondly, because I will denounce you as an accomplice and an accessory before the fact, in respect to that murder, if you hesitate to fulfil my orders! On the other hand, if you remain faithful—if you serve me with that blind obedience and implicit zeal which I exact from you, you have nothing to fear, but every thing to hope."

"Before I was in your power I had made up my mind to serve you in the manner you state," said Jeffreys; "and now of course I am compelled to do so. Give me your orders—what is there for me to undertake? Shall I inform against Josh Pedler and Tim Splint? or shall I go and set the constables upon Old Death, who was an accomplice in the robbery, since he sent those two men to commit it?"

"Silence, Jeffreys!" exclaimed the Black imperiously: "it is not for you to suggest anything—but to perform what is suggested by myself! And remember—I will not allow you to take a single step in these matters, unauthorised by me. Stir not of your own accord—or you will only involve yourself in ruin. See the position in which you are placed! If the two men who murdered Sir Henry Courtenay, be surrendered up to justice, they may confess all—and their confession would implicate you and Benjamin Bones. Nevertheless, an innocent victim shall not be sacrificed to the blood-thirsty law which authorises the punishment of death: Mr. Torrens must be saved! This is an affair which demands the greatest caution; and if you utter a word more than I direct you to speak, or take a single step unknown to me, you will be undone! But time has passed rapidly—more rapidly than I had expected, while we have been thus conversing together," added the Black, looking at his watch "It is now day-light—and you cannot depart hence until the evening."

He knew by the hour that morning had dawned some time; but the window-shutters were closed, and the curtains were thick and ample, so that not a gleam of sunshine penetrated into that apartment, where the candles were still burning.

"Yes—you must remain here until the evening," repeated the Black. "At what time was it arranged that you should meet the other agents of Old Death in order to visit St. Luke's churchyard?"

"To-night at eleven," answered Jeffreys; "and the place of appointment is at the back of the burial-ground. But do you intend, sir, that I should fulfil my agreement with Benjamin Bones?"

"Ask me no questions!" cried his master, evidently much excited—if not absolutely perplexed by the various ideas that were agitating in his brain. "I have not yet resolved how to act: I must be alone for some hours to meditate! In the meantime you no doubt stand in need of rest? Follow me."

With these words the Black took up a candle and led the way into an adjoining room, which was fitted up as a bed-chamber. There also the shutters were closed, and the curtains drawn over the windows.

"This will be your apartment until the evening."

said the Black: "but as I am accustomed to adopt all proper precautions to ensure the complete carrying out of my views, I shall be compelled to place some one with you, and I must moreover request that those shutters remain closed throughout the day."

Jeffreys new master rang a bell; and in a few minutes a tall, thin, genteel-looking lad, but of a complexion as dark as his own, answered the summons.

"Cæsar," said the older Black, addressing the lad, "you will stay in this room until I give you permission to leave it; and you will see that Jeffreys, whom I have taken into my service," he added significantly, "is supplied with every thing which he requires in the shape of refreshments."

"Yes, sir," replied the youth, in a respectful manner.

The Black then quitted the room; and Jeffreys remained with the lad who had been addressed by the name of Cæsar.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

SCENES AT THE BLACKAMOOR'S HOUSE.

WHEN the Black returned to the parlour where he had received from the lips of Jeffreys revelations which had produced a strange effect upon his mind, he threw himself upon the sofa, and gave way to his reflections.

Although he had been up all night, yet he experienced no sensation of weariness: he possessed a soul of such indomitable energy that by a natural kind of sympathy between mind and matter, it sustained even the physical powers to a wondrous degree.

We must follow him in the train of meditations into which he was plunged; for the affairs in which he suddenly found himself interested, through the confessions of John Jeffreys, were of so complicated and so difficult a nature,—involving, too, so many delicate points,—that to a mind endowed with one whit less of courage, or with one gleam less of clearness, those affairs would have appeared to be entangled beyond all possibility of a safe and prudent unravelling.

Let the reader bear in mind that there were two distinct affairs in question; although they might at a first glance be confounded, because certain persons who were connected with one were also involved in the other.

The first of these affairs was the scheme of Old Death to avenge himself on the Earl of Ellingham,—a scheme involving many frightful details, such as the exhumation of a coffin, the capture of Esther de Medina and Lady Hatfield, and the atrocity of blinding those fair and interesting creatures.

The other affair was the accusation of Mr. Torrens of a crime which he had not committed, and the necessity of proving his innocence.

"If those miscreants Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler be informed against," reasoned the Black within himself, "they will be certain that either Benjamin Bones or John Jeffreys has betrayed them, and they will accordingly give a full and complete explanation, the result of which would be that the whole four would swing together. But I am bound to save Jeffreys from that terrible fate; and God forbid that that I should be the means, direct or

indirect, of sending Benjamin Bones to the scaffold! And yet, on the other hand, knowing all that I have elicited from Jeffreys, and acting in the true spirit of that mission which I have voluntarily undertaken, I dare not allow this innocent man Torrens to be condemned by a frightful combination of circumstantial evidence, when the utterance of a single word will prove him guiltless and fix the crime on those who really perpetrated it. How stands the matter, then? Torrens must be saved on the one hand; but the real murderers must be allowed to escape on the other! Oh! this is a fatal necessity—a dreadful alternative; and yet it is imperious!”

The Black rose and paced the room with slow and measured steps. He reflected profoundly. He separated all the details of the two complicated matters which occupied his thoughts, and examined them one by one.

“In respect to the vengeance of Benjamin Bones,”—it was thus that his musings were continued after a time,—“*that scheme must be completely strangled at once—annihilated at its very commencement. Not for worlds must aught scandalous or degrading occur to Arthur, Earl of Ellingham!—not for worlds must the relationship subsisting between him and Thomas Rainford be published and proclaimed! Yes—Benjamin Bones must be rendered powerless for the future;—and yet how can this be accomplished without permitting a legal tribunal to seize upon him?*”

The Black continued to pace the room, his sable countenance denoting by its workings the searching keenness with which his mind seized upon and examined each successive project that suggested itself as a means to accomplish all his objects and carry out all his aims in a manner certain to produce the results which he was anxious and resolved to bring about.

At length one particular scheme flashed to his mind; and the smile which appeared on his countenance, as his imagination seized on that project, was an augury of its subsequent adoption. He weighed it well in all its details—he calculated its consequences—he minutely examined all its certain results,—and he arrived at the conviction that, though a large and even a dangerous measure, it was the only one whereby all his designs could be effected.

Having resolved to carry it into execution, the Black felt his mind relieved of a considerable load;—and, seating himself at the table, he wrote the following letter:—

“The account which Rosamond Torrens received from her father relative to the assassination of Sir Henry Courtenay, and which that unfortunate girl recited to you, is strictly and substantially correct. Accident has enabled me to discover the real perpetrators of the crime; and *Mr. Torrens shall be saved!* You will know in what terms to convey this assurance to that poor, suffering creature whom you have taken under your protection.”

The Black sealed this note, and addressed it to “*Miss Esther de Medina, Manor House, Finchley.*” He then repaired to the room where he had left Jeffreys and Cæsar together, and found that the former, having partaken of some refreshments, had thrown himself on the bed and fallen into a profound sleep.

“Cæsar,” said the Black, “you must hasten to Finchley with this letter. Take your horse and delay not. On your return, come back by way of

Grafton Street, and tell Dr. Lascelles that I desire to see him as soon as he can possibly visit me.”

Cæsar immediately departed to execute these commissions; and the Black seated himself by the side of the bed on which Jeffreys was sleeping.

Nearly an hour passed, and the man did not awake. The Black rang the bell, and a domestic in plain clothes answered the summons.

“Wilton,” said his master, “remain here, and keep watch upon this person,”—pointing to the sleeper. “When he awakes, ring the bell.”

The servant bowed obedience to these instructions; and the Black left the room.

* * * * *

Several hours had passed away, and it was three o’clock in the afternoon.

Cæsar had returned with letters for his master, who had scarcely made an end of their perusal when Dr. Lascelles was announced.

“Well, my dear friend,” said the physician, “what new scheme have you now in view? in what new project do you require my assistance?”

“Sit down, Doctor, and listen to me attentively,” observed the Black; “for many and strange incidents have occurred since I saw you last. But perhaps you have been to Finchley; and in that case, one of those circumstances to which I allude will have been made known to you.”

“No, my dear friend,” replied Dr. Lascelles, depositing his hat and gloves on one chair and himself in another: “I have not had time to call upon the Medinas since they removed to their country residence. I have been experimentalising on a most splendid brain which the surgeon of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital was kind enough to send me as a present. But of what nature is the circumstance of which I should have heard at Finchley, had I called? Nothing disagreeable, I hope?”

“I will explain it to you in as few words as possible,” answered the Black, seating himself opposite to the physician. “The day before yesterday—at about five o’clock in the evening—Mr. de Medina and Esther were walking along the high road in the immediate vicinity of the Manor, to which they had removed, as you are well aware, in the morning, when they saw a beautiful young creature sitting on the step of a stile, and evidently a prey to the most heart-rending anguish. They accosted her—spoke kindly to her—and at length induced her to tell just so much of her sorrowful tale as to enlist their warmest sympathies in her behalf. They took her to the Manor; but on their arrival, the poor girl was so overcome by illness, fatigue, and distress of mind, that Esther insisted on her retiring to rest. Yesterday morning she was so far recovered as to render it unnecessary to send for you in your medical capacity; and Esther assured her that she might not only look upon the Manor as her home, but that she should be treated with all the kindness, attention, and respect, due to her misfortunes. It then appears that the poor creature made a confidant of Esther, and revealed her entire story, which shows how deeply she is to be pitied, and how cruel were the circumstances that had driven her from her home, and made her resolve to fly from London as from a city of pestilence. The entire details of that story I will give you presently. Yesterday afternoon I repaired to the Manor, and the particulars connected with the young lady were confidentially narrated to me by

Mr. de Medina. Last night the metropolis rang with the rumours of a dreadful murder having been discovered—"

"The assassination of Sir Henry Courtenay," remarked the physician; "and the murderer, a gentleman named Torrens, is in Newgate."

"The alleged murderer, you mean, doctor," said the Black, emphatically. "And now prepare yourself to hear an amazing revelation—for the young creature who found an asylum at Finchley Manor, is the daughter of that *alleged murderer*, and her name is Rosamond."

"But surely she could not have been in any way implicated—"

"Patience, doctor—patience," said the Black. "On hearing last night of the arrest of Mr. Torrens, I immediately dispatched Cæsar to Finchley with a note to Mr. de Medina, containing the sad intelligence, and I find by letters which I have just received," he added, glancing towards the documents which lay open on the table, "that the news were broken as delicately as possible to the unhappy girl: nevertheless, she is, as you may suppose, a prey to the most lively grief; and it has been with the greatest difficulty that Mr. de Medina and Esther have restrained her from flying to Newgate to console her father. Let me now relate her history to you."

The Black then detailed those incidents in connexion with Rosamond, which are already known to the reader—save and except the dreadful fact that Mr. Torrens had sold his daughter's virtue to Sir Henry Courtenay; for though the unhappy girl had confessed the outrage which had been perpetrated on her, she knew not—as the reader will remember—that her own father had been an accomplice in the fearful deed.

"I have now some further explanations to give you, doctor," continued the Black; "and then I shall have completed my long, long preface to the business which induced me to request your presence here now. In pursuance of that grand and difficult project, the nature of which is so well known to you, I resolved to enlist one of Old Death's confederates, or rather instruments, in my own service. Accordingly, last night, as soon as I had dispatched Cæsar to Finchley with the note containing the intelligence of Mr. Torrens' arrest, I went into the Borough, and watched in the neighbourhood of Old Death's lodgings: for I informed you a few days ago, if you recollect, that Cæsar had succeeded in discovering the abode of that terrible man. Well, I kept not my watch uselessly; for I soon beheld three men enter the house in Horsemonger Lane, individually and at short intervals. Two of them were unknown to me—although I have since found that their names were by no means unfamiliar; but the third was a fellow of whom I knew something. This was John Jeffreys—once a servant in the employ of Sir Christopher Blunt. Now it immediately struck me that this was the very man who would suit my purposes; for he is crafty—intelligent—and always ready to serve the best pay-master. I accordingly resolved to enlist him in my employ; and to this determination I was the more readily brought, because I felt convinced that mischief was brewing under the auspices of Old Death. The fact of the three men arriving so mysteriously—singly and at short intervals, on the same evening, evidently by appointment—and the length of time they

remained in the place, were sufficient arguments to prove to a far less experienced person than myself, that a council of desperate men was being held for no good purposes. It was not until past three this morning, that the villains separated. I had already made up my mind how to act, and a hackney-coach was ordered by me to wait beneath the wall of Horsemonger Lane. I fancied that Old Death's visitors would depart singly as they had arrived; and my expectations were so far realised that Jeffreys went off by himself. I resolved to follow him home first—for I suspected that he lived at no great distance; because, I thought that if I could not succeed in inducing him to accompany me, I should at least know where to find him on another occasion. At his own door I accosted him; and, by working on his fears by means of my mysterious behaviour, as well as by holding out to him vague threats that I was prepared to carry him off by force, if he should resist me, I succeeded in bringing him blindfold to this house."

"Well done!" exclaimed the physician. "And so I presume you have regularly enlisted the respectable Mr. Jeffreys into your service—thereby securing the aid of a spy in the enemy's camp."

"The very object aimed at—the very point gained!" cried the Black, "Jeffreys, under the joint influence of bribery and menaces, is completely mine; and he gave me proofs of his fidelity by revealing to me many interesting matters. Indeed, it was providentially fortunate that I got him into my power and service just at this particular time; as you shall judge for yourself."

He then related the details of the damnable conspiracy planned by Old Death, and to be executed by his myrmidons, against the peace of the Earl of Ellingham and the happiness of Lady Hatfield and Esther de Medina.

"This man is a perfect monster!" ejaculated Dr. Lascelles indignantly. "How is it possible that you can have any forbearance, my dear friend? Set your retainers to watch for him—have him captured—and lock him up for life in one of the dungeons which he himself doubtless rendered serviceable to his own purposes on more than one occasion."

"Patience, doctor," said the Black: "nothing must be done rashly nor without due consideration. Besides, you are well aware that my object is to endeavour to reform that bad man—"

"Reform the devil!" cried the physician impatiently. "You know very well that I ridiculed the idea when you first started it."

"And I intend to try the experiment, doctor," observed the Black, calmly but firmly. "In the meantime, pray listen to me. In the course of the conversation which I had with Jeffreys this morning, he mentioned the name of Torrens; and to my surprise I found that he had lately been in that gentleman's service. When Rosamond told her story to Esther, the poor girl alluded several times to her father's man-servant, as I stated to you just now; but as she did not happen to mention his name—or if she did, it was not mentioned to me—I was unaware of the identity of that domestic and Jeffreys till the latter himself suffered the fact to transpire. Then was it that I also received a corroboration of the truth of the version which Mr. Torrens had given his daughter of those circumstances that led to the death of Sir Henry Courtenay; for Jeffreys instigated the robbery at Torrens Cot-



tage—Benjamin Bones appointed two men to execute it—and those men assassinated the baronet.”

“You have thus become the depositor of a very agreeable secret, my dear friend,” said the doctor, somewhat ironically. “How do you intend to act? For my part, I consider the position to be embarrassing; for if those two men are arrested, they will perhaps inform against Jeffreys and Old Death, —and, in this case, you lose not only your new dependant, but also the opportunity of trying your great moral theory—which I call great moral nonsense—upon the respectable Mr. Benjamin Bones.”

“Doctor—doctor,” exclaimed the Black, in a reproachful tone: “is this your friendship for me? is this the way in which you fulfil your promise of assistance?”

“Pardon me, my dear fellow,” cried the good-hearted physician, wringing his companion’s hand violently. “If I talk to you in that fashion, it is simply because I am deeply anxious for your welfare, and that—in consequence of certain circumstances which we need not specify—I look upon you just as if you were my own son. You know that I am ready to serve you by day and by night—that

you may command me at all times, and my purse to its fullest extent—”

“A thousand thanks, doctor, for these proofs of a generous friendship,” interrupted the Black. “Your assistance I indeed require: on your purse, thanks to the liberality of Mr. de Medina and the Earl of Ellingham, I shall not be compelled to make any inroad.”

“Then in what way can I assist you?” demanded the physician.

“I will explain myself,” continued the Black. “But first I must tell you that the very two men who murdered Sir Henry Courtenay, are of the gang employed by Old Death to persecute the Earl and the two ladies in whom we all feel an interest—I mean Georgiana Hatfield and Esther de Medina.”

“This makes the business more complicated,” said the doctor: “because if those two men are arrested on the charge of murder, they may perhaps confess not only that Old Death urged them to the robbery and that Jeffreys was an accomplice in it; but they may also state the services which Benjamin Bones hired them to perform respecting the Earl and the two ladies,—thereby at once publishing to the world that Thomas Rainford was indeed the

elder brother of the Earl, and propagating the infamous scandal relative to Esther de Medina having been the said Thomas Rainford's mistress."

"You embrace the whole difficulty—or rather the greater portion of it at once, my dear doctor," exclaimed the Black, delighted to find that his friend entered so minutely and with such keen perception into the affair. "The business presses in every way. In the first place, it is necessary that an innocent man should be relieved as speedily as possible from the dreadful charge hanging over his head; and secondly, the exhumation of the coffin in Saint Luke's churchyard must be prevented this night."

"Certainly it must," observed Dr. Lascelles. "For if once Old Death knew that the coffin contained not the remains of Thomas Rainford, the discovery might engender certain suspicions in the mind of such an astute old scoundrel as he."

"In a word, doctor, Torrens must be saved; and yet the two men, who rejoice in the names of Joshua Pedler and Timothy Splint, must not be handed over to justice," observed the Black.

"Such ought to be the policy adopted," said the physician: "and, remember, that though these two men are not to be rendered up to justice, they must be taken such care of for the future as to commit no more murders and accept no more employ in the service of such miscreants as Old Death."

"Of that I shall indeed take good care," said the Black.

"But how will it be possible to save Torrens without handing Splint and Pedler over to justice in his place?" demanded the physician. "You will be a clever fellow if you accomplish that difficulty."

"I am prepared to encounter it, doctor," returned the Black; "and you must aid me in the business. Are you so intimately acquainted with any magistrate or justice of the peace, that you could invite him to dinner?"

"What an extraordinary question!" cried Dr. Lascelles, laughing. "How will my asking a magistrate to dinner serve your purposes?"

"Only thus far," responded the Black: "that you would have the kindness to walk a little way with him on his return home in the evening, and that I should have you both very quietly kidnapped, blindfolded, and carried off to some place where you would both have to receive and witness the statements made by two men named Joshua Pedler and Timothy Splint, whom I shall have safe in my own custody within a few hours."

"I understand," said the physician, laughing heartily. "Capital! capital! But, by the bye,—when I think of it—your old friend Sir Christopher Blunt was gazetted two days ago to be one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex. Would he not serve your purpose? or do you think—"

The physician paused and looked the Black steadfastly and significantly in the face.

"He will answer admirably!" exclaimed the latter, after a few moments' reflection. "Yes—better than any other, all things considered! I will undertake to get him into my power without giving you the trouble to ask him to dinner. But I must request, doctor, that to-morrow night at eleven o'clock you will take a lonely walk in some very retired spot, and at a good distance off too, so that you may lose all trace of the path pursued by your kidnappers."

"You do not require two persons, surely?" said Lascelles.

"Yes—it will be better," responded the Black "a Justice of the Peace, and a competent and credible witness. Do you happen to have any patient in the neighbourhood of Bethlem, for instance?"

"Let me see," said the doctor, in a musing manner. "Yes," he cried: "an old lady whom I have not visited for some time."

"Very good," observed the Black. "Then you can call on her to-morrow evening; and between ten and eleven, as you are returning on foot—on foot, remember—you will be set upon by half a dozen ruffians," he continued, laughing, "who will blindfold you, shove you into a chaise, and carry you off—you never will be able to say whither."

"I understand you, my dear friend," said the physician, laughing heartily also. "Your scheme is admirable and certain of success."

"Thus far, then, the business is settled," observed the Black.

At that moment Cæsar entered the room, and informed his master that the man Jeffreys had just awoken, having slept uninterruptedly for many hours.

"But you have not left him alone, Cæsar?" exclaimed the Black.

"No, sir—Wilton is with him," was the answer given by the youth.

"Good!" observed his master: then, turning towards the doctor, he added, "If that fellow were to open the shutters and look out into the street, he might recognise the locality; and I intend to allow him no opportunity of playing me false."

"You act wisely," said the physician, who then took his departure, while the Black repaired to the chamber where Jeffreys was remaining.

The man rose and bowed respectfully on the entrance of his master, who, having dismissed Wilton, seated himself and proceeded to address his new dependant in the following manner:—

"I have resolved how to act in the emergencies which have arisen, and to which I have devoted my best consideration. You will not only be saved from the consequences of your connivance with the robbery which took place at Torrens Cottage, and which ended in so tragic a manner; but you will likewise be rendered secure from the possibility of being in any way implicated hereafter. My promises will be faithfully kept, if you prove faithful. But if, on the other hand, you deceive me, I will find you out wheresoever you may hide yourself; and you shall assuredly perish on the scaffold! For you cannot conceive the extent of my power to reward, nor of my ability to punish."

"I have seen enough, sir, to be convinced that you are some great person," said Jeffreys, "and I assure you that you will find me faithful and devoted."

"Act according to your words, and you will bless the day when you first encountered me," observed the Black. "And now listen to my instructions. Soon after it is dark you will be conveyed away from this house; and, at the proper hour, you will keep your appointment to-night with Pedler and Splint. You say that you are to meet them behind St. Luke's church. Do you mean in the road which separates the two burying-grounds from each other?"

"That is the place of meeting, sir," was the answer.

"Very well," continued the Black. "Is there any chance of Old Death forming one of the party?"

"Not the slightest, sir. He loves to plan and plot; but he usually pays agents to execute."

"I could have wished it had been otherwise. However, you will meet your two friends according to agreement: and you will endeavour to keep them in conversation for a few minutes in the road between the two burial-grounds. This will give my people time to surround them, as it were: for it is my intention to arrest those two men this very night."

Jeffreys looked alarmed and said, "They will be sure to think that I have betrayed them, sir."

"Leave all that to me," returned the Black. "I will take care that they shall never have the opportunity of injuring you. Wilton—the servant who has just left this chamber—will conduct the expedition to night; and he will allow you to escape. You will then proceed as quickly as possible to Seven Dials, where Old Death, according to what you told me this morning, must have already taken up his abode;—and you will tell him that when it came to the last moment, Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler were afraid to undertake the business of digging up the coffin, and resolved to have nothing more to do with him or his affairs. But you will assure him that you remain faithful to him, and that you can recommend two friends of your own who will be delighted to do all he requires for a quarter of the sum he agreed to pay Pedler and Splint. If he accepts the service of your pretended friends, you will make an appointment to meet him in some low neighbourhood the day after to-morrow, in the evening. Let the time named be a late hour; and should he wish you and your friends to call on him in Earl Street, raise objections, as it does not suit my purpose that the appointment should be there. It must be a place of meeting from which he has to walk home afterwards."

"I understand all your commands, sir," said Jeffreys; "and you may depend upon them being faithfully executed."

"I rely upon you," observed the Black; and, after a few moments' consideration, he added, "To-morrow evening at nine o'clock, punctually, you must be in Wilderness Row, beneath the wall of the Charter House gardens; and I shall send some one to receive an account of your proceedings with Old Death, and give you further instructions. But once more I say, be faithful—be prudent—and avoid any vain or foolish display of your money."

"I wish you would have more confidence in me, sir," exclaimed Jeffreys: then, after a brief pause, he said, as an idea struck him, "I have a great deal of money about me, sir—and I wish you would take care of it for me."

"Now I am convinced of your honest intentions, my good fellow," said his master, in a kinder tone than he had yet adopted towards the man. "If you propose to leave your money with me as a guarantee of your good faith, I do not now require any such security: but if your object be to place it in safety, I will accept the trust."

"Well, sir—let it be in the way you have just mentioned," returned Jeffreys.

"Here is a drawer—lock up any thing you choose therein, and take the key with you," said the Black.

Jeffreys did as he was desired: Wilton was again summoned—an excellent dinner was supplied the

new dependant and the servant who was appointed to remain with him;—and the Black retired to his own apartment.

Soon after it was dark, Jeffreys was blindfolded and conducted to a private carriage, which was waiting. Wilton accompanied him in the vehicle, which, after driving about for nearly an hour, stopped at last, and Jeffreys, on removing the bandage from his eyes, and alighting, found himself in an obscure street in the immediate vicinity of Shoreditch Church.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE SURPRISE.—JEFFREYS AND OLD DEATH.

THE deep tones of St. Luke's bell, proclaiming the hour of eleven, oscillated though the gusty air, as Tim the Snammer entered the narrow road dividing the two burial-grounds belonging to the church. John Jeffreys was already at the place of appointment; and not many moments had elapsed after those two met, ere Josh Pedler joined them, bringing with him the necessary implements for the work of resurrectionists, and which he instantly threw over the wall.

"What a windy night it is," said Tim the Snammer; "and how precious dark."

"All the better for our business," observed Josh Pedler. "I should have been here a little earlier; but I had such a cursed deal of trouble to get rid of that bothersome wench Tilda. She wouldn't let me come out at first; and swore that if I did, she'd feller me."

"And did she follow you?" demanded Jeffreys.

"Dunce a bit," answered Josh. "I was obliged to give her a good drubbing because she whimpered, and then another to make her hold her tongue; and afterwards we kissed and made it up—and so she went quietly to bed. What strange things women are, to be sure! If you beat 'em, they're sure to love you all the more."

"Well, are we going to stand here talking all night?" cried Tim the Snammer. "Who knows but what there's a watchman about here?"

"I know there is n't," said Jeffreys: "because I made the enquiry in a careless kind of way at a public-house close by, where I bought some brandy in a pint bottle."

"That's capital!" cried Tim. "Give us a dram, old feller."

"I got it on purpose to keep the cold out and our spirits up," said Jeffreys, playing his part admirably so as to gain time, in obedience to the orders he had received from his master. "Who was it that came with Tidmarsh this morning to see the place where Tom Rain is buried?"

"I did," answered Tim the Snammer, smacking his lips in approval of the brandy, and handing the bottle to Josh Pedler.

"Ah! Tom Rain was a fine fellow!" said Jeffreys. "I knew him well. In fact, I was with old Sir Christopher and Frank Curtis the night he robbed them. What a bold, dashing, and yet cool-headed chap Rainford was!"

"The finest highwayman that England ever had," observed Josh Pedler, returning the bottle to Jeffreys.

"Beat your Dick Turpins and your Jack Shep-

pards all to nothink!" added Tim the Snammer. "I say, Josh, let you and me take to the road when we've done Old Death's business for him, and sacked the blunt he's stull got to pay us."

"Well—well, we'll see about it, Tim," answered Pedler. "But—hush! here 's some one coming. Let's pretend to be walking on: we have n't time to jump over after the tools."

The three accordingly put themselves in motion; but Jeffreys knew pretty well that the critical moment was now at hand. Tim the Snammer affected to whistle a tune in a careless way; and Josh Pedler began talking loud on some indifferent subject.

Meantime, the footsteps advanced; and it was evident that more than one person was approaching. In fact, there seemed to be three or four; but Josh Pedler and Tim Splint had not the least suspicion of impending danger: they thought that a party of jovial fellows were returning from the public-house—an idea that was excited by the merry song which one of the persons now approaching was singing.

A few minutes brought the two parties within ten paces of each other; when a sudden and suspicious noise was heard, as of a rustling of clothes against the walls which bounded the road. Both Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler stopped short, alarmed and irresolute: the next instant they, as well as Jeffreys, were seized by two persons who leaped upon them from the walls, and by those who had advanced along the road.

Jeffreys was liberated the moment he mentioned his name; and he hurried away as quickly as possible from the scene of the surprise and capture;—but not before he had witnessed enough, even in the obscurity of the night, to convince him that Josh Pedler and Tim the Snammer were gagged and rendered powerless in the grasp of the agents of the mysterious Blackamoor.

And such was indeed the fact. Before they were able to offer the slightest resistance, or even utter a cry, they were reduced to the condition just described. Their captors immediately divided into two parties, each bearing off a prisoner, so that the villains had not even the consolation of remaining together.

So well were all the arrangements made to ensure the complete success of the affair, that a vehicle was waiting in the vicinity of each end of the road separating the burial-grounds; and the moment the prisoners were thrust inside, bandages were tied over their eyes.

Tim the Snammer was the first who arrived at the place of the villains' destination. At the expiration of an hour from the time of his capture, the vehicle, which had purposely driven about in a circuitous manner, stopped at a house, into which the prisoner was hurried. Up a flight of stairs he was then led—through several rooms—and at length down a long spiral descent of stone steps, a trap shutting with a crashing sound above, and a huge door opening and closing with the din of massiveness below,—then along a place in which the rapid tread of the numerous feet echoed with a gloomy and hollow sound, as if in a paved and vaulted passage,—and lastly into a dungeon, where the wretched man was deposited, unbound, and left to himself, the huge door closing upon him,—such was the hurried progress and ultimate destination of Tim the Snammer in the strange and unknown place to which his captors had borne him!

The treatment experienced by Josh Pedler was precisely the same, save that he did not enter his prison-house until a good half hour after the arrival of his companion in iniquity.

* * * * *

In the meantime, John Jeffreys proceeded to Seven Dials, and found Old Death seated with Mrs. Bunce, Toby having been dismissed—as was usual when Mr. Bones had business to transact in Earl Street—to the public-house to amuse himself with his pipe and his pint.

Old Death was surprised and alarmed when he beheld Jeffreys make his appearance so early, and unaccompanied by Tim Splint and Josh Pedler.

"Is any thing the matter?" enquired the ancient miscreant, as Mrs. Bunce carefully closed the room door.

"No great harm—only something to delay your business," replied Jeffreys.

"Well—if it's no worse, there is n't much harm done," said Old Death. "But where are the others?"

"It's just on account of them that nothing has been done to-night," answered Jeffreys. "In two words, they funk'd over the affair and have given it up."

"What!" cried Old Death, his countenance becoming grim and ghastly with rage and disappointment: "those scoundrels have received my money—my good money—thirty pounds each, in advance—and have given up the business! You are joking, Jeffreys,—you are bantering me! Why, Tim the Snammer would go through fire and water for such a sum of money as I promised him; and Josh Pedler would sell his skin for half the amount."

"All I can say is this, Mr. Bones," continued Jeffreys, "that I was punctual at the place of meeting at five minutes to eleven; and when Tim Splint and Josh Pedler made their appearance, they said they had changed their minds and should not proceed farther in the business, and that I might come and tell you so if I liked."

"The villains!—the rascals!" growled Old Death, clenching his fists, and working his toothless jaws about horribly as he spoke.

"I asked them what had made them come to such a resolution," proceeded Jeffreys; "and they said that on account of Torrens's affair they had plenty of money, and it was useless to risk transportation by turning resurrectionists, at least before it was all spent. I argued with them—but it was all in vain: they went away to some public-house; and as I could n't do the job myself, I started off here to tell you what had occurred."

"Those men don't know me, or they would not attempt to play their tricks in this fashion," murmured Old Death: then, turning towards Jeffreys, he said in a louder tone, and in a conciliating manner, "But you are a good fellow—you are faithful and true, as I always found you; and I am pleased with you. The day will come when Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler shall bitterly repent of their conduct! But in the meantime I am not to be disappointed in my vengeance—I will not be foiled; I have set my mind on a particular course—and I will follow it."

"There are other men in the world who can do all you require, Mr. Bones, besides Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler," said Jeffreys. "I wish you had spoken to me first of all——"

"Why so?" demanded Old Death, hastily.

"Because I could have got a couple of claps to help me to do all the business, and who would have been contented with a quarter of the money you promised those sneaking scoundrels Splint and Pedler," answered Jeffreys.

"Indeed!" cried Old Death eagerly. "You are a good fellow, Jeffreys—an excellent fellow; and you may always calculate upon having me as your friend. But where are these people that you speak of?—who are they?"

"You don't know any thing of them, I fancy," was the reply. "They are like myself—servants out of place; but they are a precious sight worse off than me in respect to money-matters, and would be glad to do any odd job for a ten-pound note or so."

"And when can you see them?" demanded Old Death.

"When can I see them?" repeated Jeffreys in a musing tone, as if he were giving the matter his most serious consideration: "why—I might hunt them up to-morrow night—in fact, I'm sure I could——"

"And you can make an appointment for me to see them the night after?" said Old Death, with fiendish eagerness to consummate the atrocious vengeance which he had planned.

"I will undertake to do that, Mr. Bones," returned Jeffreys. "Shall I explain to them the nature of the business before they see you, or not?"

"No—let me see them first!" said Old Death. "Or stay—you may sound 'em about the resurrection business—but mention no names at all. Don't tell them who has employed you to treat with them——"

"Mr. Bones is a good judge of people's faces," observed Mrs. Bunce; "and knows by their looks whether they're to be trusted or not."

"Generally speaking, I do—generally speaking," said Old Death. "Now, for instance," he added, staring from beneath his shaggy, over-hanging brows, full upon the countenance of Jeffreys, "I know that you're faithful—and I can trust you."

The man to whom these words were addressed, met the searching look fixed upon him with an unchanging cheek and eyes that quailed not; although for a moment he feared lest Old Death had suddenly entertained some suspicion concerning him. But it seemed that the ancient miscreant, with all his boasted skill in reading the human physiognomy, was on this occasion completely at fault.

"To tell you the truth, Jeffreys," he continued, "I never liked the looks of the Snammer; but I thought that good pay would make him faithful. However, he will yet repent his conduct towards me—and so shall Josh Pedler. If it wasn't for their infernal treachery, my vengeance would be by this time in a fair way towards prompt and speedy gratification. For if that Earl was allowed to go scot-free—if I didn't punish him—aye, and fearfully too—for all the injuries he has done to me, I should go mad! My property all destroyed—my riches taken from me—the very house that was so useful to me——"

"Don't take on so, Mr. Bones!" interrupted Mrs. Bunce, in a coaxing manner. "Come—shall I put a little brandy on the table?"

"No—gin!" ejaculated Old Death savagely: then, turning towards Jeffreys, he said, "You won't bring

those friends of yours here, mind, the night after to-morrow: it will be quite time to let them know where I live and where business will afterwards lead them to meet me, when I have satisfied myself that they are of the right sort."

"You don't think I would ask you to employ any one that I wasn't sure of?" exclaimed Jeffreys, affecting an angry tone.

"No—no, my good fellow," hastily responded Old Death: "but experience—experience teaches us much; and my experience is greater than yours. Come—take a glass of gin-and-water, and don't be annoyed. I did n't mean to vex you."

"Say no more about it, then," observed Jeffreys. "Where shall we meet the night after to-morrow?"

"Let me see," mused Benjamin Bones aloud: "I have an appointment for that evening in the actual neighbourhood of St. Luke's Church; and there is a flash ken in Helmet Row, called the *Stout House*. We will meet there between ten and eleven."

"Agreed," said Jeffreys. "Have you any farther instructions?"

"None—none, my good fellow," answered Old Death: "only don't promise your two friends too much for the services required of them. You see how I have lost already by those scoundrels Pedler and Splint: but I will be even with them—I will!"

"The two persons I shall introduce to you will do your work well and cheap, Mr. Bones," replied Jeffreys; "and I am sure you will be satisfied. I shall now be off—because I may perhaps find them to-night. At all events we meet at the *Stout House*, Helmet Row, the night after next."

"Exactly," said Old Death. "By the way, if you run against Tim the Snammer or Josh Pedler, just try and find out where they are to be met with, and let me know."

"I'll bear it in mind," answered Jeffreys.

He then took his departure, well pleased at the success which had hitherto attended his proceedings in working out the designs and fulfilling the instructions of his master.

But who was that master?—and where dwelt the mysterious personage? Ah! these were points which defied all conjecture.

On the following evening, shortly before nine o'clock, Jeffreys was pacing Wilderness Row, in obedience to the appointment arranged by his employer.

He was not kept waiting many minutes, ere the youth Cæsar accosted him.

"Our master," said the lad, "has sent me to inquire of you the result of your interview with Old Death; and he desires me to assure you that he is well satisfied with your conduct of last night, inasmuch as you effectually amused your companions until their captors came up. But what of Old Death?"

"He has completely fallen into the snare laid for him," answered Jeffreys; "and will meet me and my two friends," he added significantly, "at the *Stout House*, Helmet Row, to-morrow night between ten and eleven."

"Good!" observed Cæsar. "Wilton and another of our master's retainers, both dressed in a suitable manner, will meet you at that place to-morrow night shortly before ten, so that you may have time to arrange the plan of proceeding together, before Old Death makes his appearance."

"I shall not fail to be there at a quarter to ten," answered Jeffreys. "Have you any farther orders for me?"

"Yes," replied Cæsar: "listen! To-morrow you must endeavour to find out the abode of one Tidmarsh, a friend of Old Death's."

"That will be easily accomplished to-morrow night when I meet Benjamin Bones," said Jeffreys. "You are aware that the object of my appointment with him, is to introduce to him two friends of mine who will undertake to dig up the remains of Tom Rainford, the famous highwayman."

"Yes—yes," said Cæsar hastily.

"Well," continued Jeffreys, "I am supposed to be the leader of the party by whom that task is to be performed; and I shall tell Old Death that he must send Tidmarsh with me in the morning to point out the place where Rainford is buried. He will then let me know where Tidmarsh lives; or else will at once make him write a note to that person to arrange an appointment."

"I understand," said Cæsar. "But suppose that Old Death will do neither, alleging that he will call himself on Tidmarsh and send him to meet you on the following morning at some place named? In this case all will be wrong, because Old Death is to be captured to-morrow night on his way home. Had you not better call in Seven Dials to-morrow morning, tell Old Death that you have found your friends and made the appointment with them for the evening, and then ask him to let Tidmarsh at once afford you the clue you will require to—to—the grave of Rainford?" asked the lad, his voice trembling and hesitating slightly as he uttered the concluding words of his question.

"I understand you perfectly, Cæsar," replied Jeffreys. "Leave it to me to manage as our master desires: I will undertake to be able to give Wilton good news of Tidmarsh to-morrow night."

"Our master will rely upon you," said the youth. "Meantime farewell;"—and he hurried rapidly away, Jeffreys not offering to follow him.

CHAPTER XC

THE NEW JUSTICE OF THE PEACE.

SIR Christopher Blunt was seated in his library, on the same evening which saw the interview between Cæsar and Jeffreys; and his countenance was animated with a glow of indescribable delight as he glanced his eyes over several letters which he opened one after another.

He was dressed in a very elegant manner; though he had somewhat punished his corns by persisting to wear tight boots in order to make his feet look small, and he might have felt a trifle or so easier at the waist if he had not tied his waistcoat strings so tight. But if Sir Christopher Blunt chose to enhance the fascinations of his appearance by converting himself into a voluntary victim of that all-powerful Inquisition called "Fashion,"—if Sir Christopher Blunt, like a great many other silly, old gentlemen of this age, smiled at his self-martyrdom with the equanimity of a saint broiling on a gridiron,—it is no business of any body save the Sir Christopher Blunt aforesaid.

In spite of the pinching boots and the excruciat-

ing tightness of the figured silk waistcoat, the worthy knight was in a most glorious humour. It was not because fortune had favoured him with great wealth: he was so accustomed to riches by this time that a little poverty might have proved an agreeable variation, if only for the excitement of the thing. Neither was it the pleasing fact that his dear spouse had been in such a hurry to present him with a son and heir, that she could not wait longer than three months after their marriage;—for Sir Christopher was already accustomed to the cries of the child, and somehow or another was growing less and less proud of his paternal honours every day, the reasoning of Dr. Wagtail relative to the premature birth appearing more and more illogical each time he sate himself down to reflect upon it. "Then, what *was* the cause of the worthy knight's joyousness and good humour on the evening in question?" demands the impatient reader: to which query we hasten to reply—"Sir Christopher Blunt had just been placed in the commission of the peace, and congratulatory letters from his friends were pouring in on all sides!"

"Well, upon my word, this is very pleasant," said Sir Christopher to himself. "I should not have thought that I was so beloved! Not a man in England has such a host of dear, disinterested friends as I seem to possess. Scarcely does my name appear in the *Gazette*, when—whisk! in come the letters, by twopenny post and general—by hand and by conveyance! And some too are from people that really had no particular cause to be so devoted to me—people that I never spoke to six times in my life! But let's see—what have we here? A sheet of foolscap completely covered—and crossed in some parts. God bless me! what a letter. Why, it must have taken the man an hour to write it; and I am sure it will take me two to read it. But who does it come from? *Henry Atkins!* Henry Atkins—who the deuce is he? Oh! I remember—the gentleman who allowed me a seat in his pew at Hackney, when I went to lodge there four years ago for the benefit of my health. Well, it's very kind of him to write me this long letter of congratulation—for I never exchanged ten words with him in my life. But let's see what he says. '*My dear Blunt.*' Very friendly indeed! '*It was with indescribable delight and supreme satisfaction that I heard of your appointment to a position which no man in Europe can fill with more suitable dignity than yourself.*' Well, come—that's a good beginning. '*Your business habits, your high standing in society, your great name, your unblemished character, your brilliant talents, and your immense benevolence, render you most eligible to fill that office, and most competent to discharge its functions.*' Upon my honour, it's very prettily worded—quite sonorous! It reads admirably. And this sincere and heart-felt congratulation is from a man whom I scarcely know. But he seems to know me well enough, however. '*In these times of agricultural distresses and commercial embarrassment—in this age when England's heaven is overcast with lowering clouds, and the storms of anarchy and discontent menace us imminently—it is delightful to reflect that authority is so judiciously entrusted as in your case.*' That's the best rounded period I ever met within my life. What a clever, far-seeing, shrewd man this Atkins must be: and what an idiot I have been not to cultivate the acquaintance of such a sincere friend! '*But it is chiefly your*

benevolence—it is principally your boundless charity, which is the theme of all praise, which is chanted by all tongues, and which is hymned beneath every roof throughout the length and breadth of the land.' Well, I could not have believed that I was so famous—particularly on that score. However, it must be so, since Atkins says it is. 'Yes, my dear Blunt,'—very friendly indeed!—'it is your boundless charity, your anxiety to do good to deserving persons, that will hand your name down to posterity, and send it floating like an eternal bark, over the waves of Time.' Egad! that's splendid. Milton never wrote any thing finer. I have never read Milton, it is true; but I am sure Atkins can beat him. Let us see how it goes on. 'It is under these impressions, and acting in obedience to these convictions, that I have ventured to address you.' And I am very glad he has. I'll write to him presently and tell him I shall always be delighted to hear from him. Let's see—where was I? Oh!—'ventured to address you for the purpose of soliciting your and under very peculiar circumstances.' Hem! I don't like that sentence so much as the others. 'I am a man possessing a large family and very limited means; and business having been lately indifferent, I have fallen into sad arrears with my landlord.' The style gets worse—that's clear! 'At this present moment I have an execution in my house for forty pounds; and when I look around me, I behold a distracted wife on one side, and a grim bailiff in possession on the other.' This is the least interesting part of his letter: that period was not at all well turned. Milton beats him hollow there. 'If, then, my dear Blunt,'—damned familiar, though, with his 'dear Blunt,' upon my honour!—'If, then, my dear Blunt, you would favour me with the loan of fifty pounds for three months,'—Confound his impudence!" ejaculated the knight, throwing the letter into the waste-paper basket. "A man I know nothing of—who knows nothing of me—who never saw me ten times in his life—to ask me for fifty pounds! It is absurd—preposterous!"

And the knight's countenance underwent a complete change, which lasted for several minutes, until its joyous expression was gradually recalled by the perusal of letters which contained congratulations only, without soliciting favours.

Presently a servant entered the room, and stated that a gentleman named Lykspittal requested an interview with Sir Christopher Blunt.

"Show him up—show him up immediately!" exclaimed the knight. "I have been expecting the gentleman this last half-hour," he added, looking at his watch. "It is now nine—and he was to have been here soon after eight."

The domestic withdrew, and speedily returned, ushering in a thin, pale, elderly, sneaking-looking man, dressed in a suit of black which would not bear too close an inspection in the day-time, but passed off well enough by candle-light.

"Sit down, Mr. Lykspittal—pray sit down," said the knight, looking, in contrast with the visitor, just like a wax figure recently added to Madame Tussaud's exhibition, so bright was the red of his animated cheeks, so glossy his coat and trowsers, and so stiff and starch his attitude. "You have been well recommended to me, Mr. Lykspittal, by a friend to whom your literary labours have given complete satisfaction, and who speaks highly of you as a man in whom implicit confidence may be placed."

"I am very much obliged to you, Sir Christopher, for the kind opinion you have formed of me," answered the visitor in a tone of the deepest veneration and respect, and appearing by his manner as if he did not dare to say that his soul was his own. "Allow me to congratulate you, Sir Christopher, on your appointment as one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace. I am convinced a worthier selection could not have been made."

"Well, you're very kind, Mr. Lykspittal," returned the knight. "All my friends seem to agree that the Lord Chancellor acted in a wise and prudent manner in placing my name before his most gracious Majesty for the purpose: and it will be my endeavour, Mr. Lykspittal," added Sir Christopher, pompously, "to discharge the duties of my office with credit to myself and benefit to my country."

"It is not every one who possesses your advantages, Sir Christopher," observed his visitor, in a cinging tone and with a sycophantic manner which would have disgusted any person endowed with good sense and proper feeling; but which were particularly pleasing to the shallow-pated, self-sufficient old beau.

"At the same time," said Sir Christopher, "whatever advantages I may possess—whatever be those merits which have placed me in this—this—"

"Enviably and responsibly," suggested Mr. Lykspittal, meekly.

"Enviably and responsibly position," continued the knight, adopting the epithets as coolly and quietly as if they were prompted by his own imagination;—"at the same time," he said, "it will not be amiss if certain measures be adopted to—to—"

"Enhance the popularity of your name," observed Mr. Lykspittal, in the same low, cringing, and meek tone as before.

"Just so," exclaimed the knight. "In fact, I mean to take a high stand in the county—to put myself more forward than I have hitherto done—to attend public meetings and—"

"Public dinners," suggested Mr. Lykspittal.

"Exactly," said Sir Christopher: "in a word, I want to—to—"

"Become a public man," added the ready-witted gentleman, whose business it was to furnish ideas to those who furnished him with cash in return.

"You understand me as well as I understand myself, Mr. Lykspittal," observed the knight.

"It's my business, sir," was the answer. "Besides, you are so enlightened and enlightening a man, Sir Christopher, that you may be regarded as a lamp constantly diffusing its lustre even upon the darkest and most chaotic ideas. Pardon me, Sir Christopher, for being so bold as to express my opinion: but it is the truth—and I never flatter."

"I am convinced you speak with sincerity, my dear sir," said the new Justice of the Peace, playing with his eye-glass. "Well, then, Mr. Lykspittal—to go back to our original subject—the subject of this interview—I think you fully comprehend me. Indeed, I know that you do. It is my object and my determination to take a high position in the county—so that I may in a short time reckon upon the honour of being one of its representatives in Parliament."

"Very easily managed, Sir Christopher," said Mr. Lykspittal. "The electors would be proud of such

a man as yourself:—pardon me for making the observation—but I never flatter. In the first instance, however, it is necessary that they should know you well.

"Now we are coming to the point, my dear sir," exclaimed the knight.

"Will you permit me to offer my suggestions?" asked Mr. Lykspittal, in a tone of insinuating meekness.

"Certainly—by all means. Proceed."

"Well, Sir Christopher, in the first place I should propose that a pamphlet be written on some taking subject, and addressed to your worship," continued Mr. Lykspittal. "Suppose we say the *Corn Laws*—or *Prison Discipline*—or *Catholic Emancipation*—or *Church Extension*—or *Parliamentary Reform*—or *Labour in Factories*—"

"All good subjects, Mr. Lykspittal—all good subjects," observed the knight. "But I do not mind telling you in private, that I know nothing about any one of them."

"Of course not, Sir Christopher," exclaimed Mr. Lykspittal. "It is not to be expected that a man of your standing will trouble himself about the details of such trivial matters. But which side will you take—the Liberal or the Tory?"

"Oh! the Tory, by all means!" cried Sir Christopher.

"Very good, my dear sir," said Mr. Lykspittal. "It is all the same to me—I can write on one side as well as on the other. Suppose, then, we take up the subject of *Catholic Emancipation*, which begins to make a great noise.* A pamphlet must be got up, supposed to be written by '*A Friend to the Established Church*,' and it must be in the shape of a letter addressed to yourself. I should begin by saying,—SIR,—*The interest which you are known to take in this great and important question—the perseverance you have manifested in making yourself acquainted with all the bearings of the case, its certain results and its inevitable influences—the staunch and long-tried ardour which you have evinced in maintaining and upholding the institutions of the Established Church—the numerous proofs which you have given of your attachment to the Protestant Faith—and the fact that the eyes of the whole country are upon you as a man resolved, at any personal sacrifice, and at all individual risks, to oppose all dangerous innovations and resist all perilous changes—these motives, sir, have induced me to address the following pages to you.*"

"Nothing can be better, Mr. Lykspittal!" exclaimed the knight. "I should, however, be glad if you will, in the course of the pamphlet, allude especially—and more than once, too—to the fact that I have been the artificer of my own fortune—that I raised myself from nothing—and that the greatest mistake the liverymen of Portsoken ever made was to reject me as a candidate for the aldermanic gown of that ward."

"I shall not forget, Sir Christopher," observed Mr. Lykspittal.

"And you may add, my dear sir," continued the knight, pompously, "that you are well aware that circumstances have since occurred to make me rejoice at that rejection."

"I will declare it to be a well known fact amongst all your friends," said the accommodating literary gentleman.

*The reader will observe that this was said in the year 1827, before the emancipation of the Catholics took place.

"And you may touch upon the zeal—the ability—and the efficiency with which I performed the duties of the shieralty—the very arduous duties of that office," observed the new Justice of the Peace.

"I shall certainly do so, Sir Christopher," replied Mr. Lykspittal; "and it will only be telling the exact truth."

"You may likewise touch upon the reward which it graciously pleased the illustrious Prince to confer upon me," continued the magistrate: "I mean—the honour of knighthood."

"As a matter of course, my dear sir; and never was that title bestowed upon a gentleman better calculated to wear it worthily."

"I thank you, Mr. Lykspittal," returned Sir Christopher, "for your very flattering opinion of me. When can the pamphlet be got ready?"

"I shall set about it immediately, sir," was the answer. "The moment it is published, you must seize upon some point, which I shall purposely leave open for discussion, and write a letter to a morning newspaper, declaring that you agree with the general tenour of the work, but that you totally dissent from that particular doctrine."

"Decidedly," said Sir Christopher. "You will then write a reply, through the same channel, and signed '*A Friend of the Established Church*.'"

"That is my intention. We shall thus excite an interest relative to the pamphlet, and your name, Sir Christopher, will be kept before the public. The discussion may lead to a second pamphlet—"

"Stay!" exclaimed the knight, smiling with the brightness of the idea which had just struck him: "we will manage better than all that! You shall write a pamphlet which you must address to me in the terms just now specified by you; but the work must contain throughout opinions totally opposed to mine, and the object of the pamphlet must seem to be my conversion to your particular way of thinking. Then I must write another pamphlet in answer—or rather, you must write it for me; and you must cut up, hip and thigh, and completely refute all the doctrines set forth in the first pamphlet. In fact, you must start a theory in that first pamphlet, and knock it down altogether in the second, which must be supposed to come from me."

"A very ingenious idea, my dear sir," said Mr. Lykspittal, "and just such an one as I should have expected from a man of your enlightened mind. I admire the plan amazingly; and will set to work at once."

"Very good," exclaimed Sir Christopher. "I will write you a cheque for thirty guineas on account. You will of course make all the necessary arrangements with the printer and stationer, and you may apply to me for money as you require it. I shall do the thing handsomely, and spend fifty pounds at least in advertising each pamphlet."

Mr. Lykspittal coincided altogether in the propriety of these intentions—indeed, he never was known to differ from a patron in the whole course of his life; and, having received the cheque, he took his leave, walking backwards to the door in homage to the great man who had just been placed in the commission of the peace.

Almost immediately after the departure of Mr. Lykspittal, a servant entered, announcing Captain O'Blunderbuss.



CHAPTER XCI.

CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS AGAIN.—ANOTHER
STRANGE VISITOR.

SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT was a man having many antipathies. Since his rejection for Portsoken he had disliked all aldermen, individually and collectively; and since his union with the present Lady Blunt, he had conceived a violent aversion for all lady's-maids. He abominated Italian organ-players, and hated mendicants. Many other dislikes had Sir Christopher Blunt;—but of the whole batch, none was more settled, more genuine, and more sincere than his antipathy for Irishmen generally, and Captain O'Blunderbuss in particular.

His interview with Mr. Lykspittal had left complacent smiles upon his countenance;—but these suddenly yielded to clouds of the darkest description when the domestic announced the name of that dreadful and dreaded man.

"Be the powers, and how is your wor-r-r-ship?" roared Captain O'Blunderbuss, at the top of his stentorian voice, rattling the r most awfully, as he

strode towards the knight with outstretched hand. "tip us your fin, my hearty,—and allow me to congratulate ye on your appintment to the Commission of the Pace!"

Thus speaking, the captain shook with such exceeding violence the member which he metaphorically designated as a fin, that the wretched Sir Christopher groaned aloud, while tears started into his eyes.

"Be Jasus! and it's proud I am to own ye as my frind, Sir Christopher!" continued the gallant officer, not observing the pain which his proof of extreme cordialty inflicted upon the worthy knight: then, throwing himself into a chair, he exclaimed, "That rascal of a lacquey of your's told me you was out; but I wasn't to be desayved in such a gross fashion any how. So I just tould him my mind—"

"And what was that, captain?" asked the knight, in a half terrified—half sulky tone.

"That he was an insolent blackguard, Sir Christopher," returned O'Blunderbuss emphatically; "and be Jasus! I was just on the point of taching him how to behave towards his superiors, when I saw the gentleman who was last with ye coming

out, and he told me that your wor-r-ship was at home."

"But I—I am very particularly engaged, captain," said the knight; "and if you would excuse me now—another time I shall be happy—when you are passing this way—"

"Be the holy poker! and there's no time like the present!" interrupted the captain; "and as I want just to have a little come chat with you, my dear frind, may be ye'll orthor up the whiskey at once, and so save us the throuble of talking dry-lipped."

"Really, Captain O'Blunderbuss," stammered the knight, "as a gentleman—as a—ahem—a person being in the Commission of the Peace—I—must protest against—this—this intrusion—"

"Intrusion do ye call it?" vociferated the captain: then, after a few moments' pause, during which he surveyed Sir Christopher in a most ferocious manner, he suddenly assumed a milder demeanour, and, coolly ringing the bell, said, "Be Jasus! I'll save ye the throuble of giving any orthers at all, my frind."

"Captain O'Blunderbuss," cried Sir Christopher, plucking up a spirit, "I will not be treated in this manner! One would think that I am not master in my own house. I have already told you that I am very particularly occupied with business—in consequence of my recent appointment to—"

"To the Commission of the Peace!" added the captain. "Well, my frind—and we are going to drink success to the Commission and the Peace and all the rest of it. My good fellow," he continued, addressing himself to the footman who now entered the room, "bring up the whiskey and hot wather, with the sugar and a lemon—d'ye hear?"

"Do n't do any such thing," exclaimed Sir Christopher, now in a furious passion. "Who are you, sir, that thus dares to give orders in the house of—of an ex-sheriff and an actual magistrate?" demanded the knight, in a stern and pompous tone for the presence of the servant seemed to be a kind of protection beneath the shield of which the old gentleman grew every moment more valourous.

"Be the powers! and that sam' is soon answered," said the captain, rising from his chair and drawing himself up to his full height. "Is it myself that ye are after enquiring about, Sir Christopher? Be Jasus, then—it's Capthain O'Bluntherbuss, I am—of Bluntherbuss Park, Connemara; and it's a pair of pistols I've got for any man who dares to insult that same Capthain O'Bluntherbuss. So, if you're for war-r-r, Sir Christopher-r-r," roared the gallant gentleman, "it shall be war-r-r; and if ye're for pace, let it be pace—and potheen!"

The captain looked so very terrible—grew so awfully red in the face—seemed to swell out so tremendously at the chest—and raised his voice to such a thundering tone, as he enunciated his name and that of his imaginary estate, that Sir Christopher's valour, like the courage of Bob Acres, oozed rapidly away, and the servant drew back as near the door as possible so as to be able to beat a retreat, in case of need, without any assistance from the warlike Irishman's foot.

"Is it war-r-r, or pace?" demanded the captain, seeing that the enemy was discomfited.

"Peace—peace, captain,—by all means," returned the knight, in a tremulous voice. "You'll alarm Lady Blunt—and—make the dear baby cry—"

"It's pace—and potheen, sirrah," said the mili-

tary gentleman, addressing himself in a tone of stern determination to the domestic, who instantly disappeared. "Now, my dear frind, ye're too impatient be half," continued the captain, resuming his chair and again speaking to the knight: "you do n't give me time to explain to ye the nature of my business and the reason of me calling; for sure and it was to tell ye how plazed your nev-ry Misther Frank Cuntis is to think that ye're put in the Commission of the Peace—and how sorry he is to think that ye should have lost any thing by that scounthrel Howard—and how plazed he is to learn that your son and heir is flourishng just like a green bay-leaf—and how sorry he is to think that your frind Torrens should have got himself into such a tirrrible pothor—and how plazed he is to be able to send ye back the thrifling amount of five hunthred pounds which ye was kind enough to advance him t' other day—"

"Oh! he has done *that*, has he?" said Sir Christopher, rubbing his hands, and evidently getting into a better humour. "Well, I am glad he has fulfilled the little engagement, at all events; and I shall not hesitate to receive it, because—because I am sure he would not have sent it, if he could n't have spared it."

"Your nev-ry, my dear sir, is a man of honour—like myself!" cried the captain, striking his breast very hard, so that it gave forth a hollow, rumbling sound, as if he had a small drum buttoned inside his frock-coat. "But, be the powers! here's the potheen; and it's over the glass that we'll settle the little business of the five hunthred pounds."

The servant placed the tray upon the table, and withdrew. Sir Christopher then, with the politeness of a man who is about to receive the payment of money which he had never expected, did the honours in a most affable manner, and only seemed contented when the captain, having poured half a tumbler of scalding hot toddy down his throat, declared that it was excellent!

"And now for the little business," resumed the gallant gentleman; and he forthwith began to fumble in his pockets, producing various pieces of paper, and discarding them one after the other as soon as he consecutively glanced at their contents. "That's not it, be the powers!" he said, laying down a piece of a play-bill;—"and that's not it, be the holy poker!" he added, throwing aside an old account of his washerwoman's: "nor yet that, be Jasus!" he continued, similarly disposing of a tailor's bill. "Why—what the blazes could I have done with the note?"

"Dear me, captain," observed Sir Christopher, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "it is very imprudent of you to carry notes about loose in that way."

"So it is, my dear frind," returned the gallant gentleman; "but it's a fashion I have, d'ye see—and it's hard to break one-self of habits of the kind. Be the powers! and here it is at last!"

"All right—all right," said Sir Christopher, rubbing his hands.

"Ye can give me change out of a thousand pounds, can't ye, my dear frind?" demanded the captain, crunching a bit of paper in his hand as he spoke.

"Oh! I can write a cheque for the difference, you know," returned the knight. "I presume it's a note for a thousand pounds?"

"Just so," responded the captain; "and as good

as a Bank of England note, be the powers—although 'tis n't quite payable at sight."

"Not payable at sight!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, in astonishment. "Why—I never heard of the Bank of England issuing notes that weren't payable on demand."

"Egad, nor I!" said Captain O'Blunderbuss. "But sure it is n't a Bank of England note at all, at all: it's just my own acceptance——"

"Your acceptance!" groaned the knight, his countenance becoming suddenly blank.

"Yes—be Jasus! and here it is, my dear find," returned O'Blunderbuss, thrusting the crumpled slip of paper into Sir Christopher's hand. "It's as dacent a note for a promissory one as ever you'd wish to see, and as good as any of the paltry flimsy stuff that the Bank of England ever issued—or the Bank of Ould Ireland either—and that's not even saying enough for it."

Sir Christopher—looking indeed like a knight of the rueful countenance—turned the document over and over in his hands, having glanced impatiently at its contents, which were drawn out in the usual style of a bill of exchange, Captain O'Blunderbuss having accepted it in favour of Frank Curtis, for the amount of One Thousand Pounds, and at three months after date.

"Well, Sir Christopher, and what d'ye say to that, my old buck?" cried the captain, apparently surprised that the knight had not already expressed his admiration at the whole proceeding.

"What—what would you have me do with this?" asked Sir Christopher, in a hesitating manner; for the fact is, he could not think well of it, and he dared not speak ill of it.

"Is it what you should do with it?" vociferated the captain. "Arrah! and be Jasus, man, pay yourself out of it and write me a cheque for the balance."

"But, captain—I—I am no discounteer," remonstrated the knight. "This little slip of paper is no use to me."

"Why! sirrah, and just now you was prepared to pay me the difference if it had been a Bank-note!" cried O'Blunderbuss. "D'ye suspet the thing, my frind? For if you mane to inf' that 't's n't as good as a Bank-note, it's a direct insult to myself; and, be the Lord Harry! it's me that'll resent it."

With these words, the captain assumed a most menacing attitude; and Sir Christopher was already in a dreadful fright lest he should be compelled to submit to this new demand on the part of the extortioner, when the footman entered to announce that a gentleman was waiting in the parlour down stairs to speak to him upon very particular and urgent business.

"You must excuse me for a few minutes, Captain O'Blunderbuss," said the knight, rising to quit the apartment.

"By all manes," cried that gentleman. "We can finish the little matter presently; and during your absence I'll pay my respects to the potheen."

Sir Christopher accordingly repaired to the ground-floor parlour, where he beheld a venerable old man who rose from the sofa whereon he was seated, to greet him.

The stranger's aspect was indeed most imposing and respectable. From beneath a back silk skull-cap flowed hair as white as silver; and his form seemed bowed by the weight of years. He was

dressed in a complete suit of black, having knee-breeches, silk stockings, and shoes with large silver buckles. He supported himself by means of a stick, and appeared to walk with considerable difficulty.

"Pray be seated, sir," exclaimed the knight, already prepossessed in favour of his venerable-looking visitor, who resumed his place on the sofa in such a manner that the light of the lamp should not fall upon his countenance, which however appeared to be very pale and drawn up about the mouth with the wrinkles of age.

"Sir Christopher Blunt," said the old gentleman, in a tremulous voice, "I have ventured to intrude myself upon you, for the purpose of soliciting a very great favour. It is not of the ordinary nature of boons—it involves nothing of a pecuniary kind; for, thank heaven! I am placed far above the necessity of requiring such succour. Indeed, I may say that I enjoy affluence."

"Be assured, my dear sir," returned the knight, whose respect for his visitor was amazingly enhanced by this announcement—"be assured that if I can serve you in any way—compatible with my honour as a man, and with my position as an individual in the Commission of the Peace——"

"It is just because you are a magistrate, Sir Christopher," interrupted the old gentleman, his tone becoming slightly less tremulous as he continued, "that I have now visited you. Not that any other magistrate would have failed to answer my purpose; but I have heard so much in your favour—the admirable manner in which you filled the office of Sheriff—the becoming way in which you presented the address to his present Majesty, when Prince Regent, and which was so very properly rewarded by the honour of Knighthood—the dignified manner in which you left the ungrateful livery-men of Portsoken to ruminate over their folly in bestowing their votes on your unworthy rival in that grand contest,—in a word, Sir Christopher, the whole tenour of your life, from the period when you were poor and friendless until now that you are a rich, esteemed, and influential member of society——"

"My dear sir—my dear sir," cried Sir Christopher, absolutely whumping for joy at hearing his praises thus chanted by a gentleman of so venerable and saint-like an appearance; "I really must know you better—I—I am quite at a loss to express my thanks—my——"

"No thanks are required by one who proclaims the truth," said the stranger, shaking his respectable old head in a solemn and imposing manner. "You will yet be a great—a very great man, Sir Christopher; or my experience, which is of four-score winters, is miserably—miserably deceived."

"Do you really think so, my dear sir?" exclaimed Sir Christopher. "Well, I suppose you know—or perhaps you may not—that I am a very stanch and sincere friend to the Established Church—that I am entirely opposed to Catholic Emancipation—that I have made the subject a profound study, and have devoted—I wish to God Lykspittal was here to prompt me," he muttered in an under-tone to himself.

"I was not exactly aware of all that, my good—my worthy Sir Christopher Blunt," responded the old gentleman; "but I respect you all the more now that I am acquainted with those facts. Indeed, I am proud and delighted to have the honour of your acquaintance—an honour for which I have

long craved urgently. But let me return to the subject of my visit? I was saying that you could render me a great—a very great favour, and at the same time convince the world how zealous, how active, and how worthy a magistrate you are."

"My dear sir, I shall be quite delighted to serve you," cried Sir Christopher, catching also at the idea of serving himself by performing some duty which would put him in such a comfortable and desirable light before the world.

"The fact is, most estimable man," continued the stranger, his voice again becoming very tremulous, as if with deep emotion, so that Sir Christopher was positively affected in no ordinary degree, "two men, stained with a dreadful crime, and now in a position which precludes the possibility of their appearing before a magistrate, are anxious to confess their enormity to some competent authority; and I have selected you for the reasons which I mentioned just now."

"You have done me infinite honour, my dear sir," cried the knight. "I presume that this confession will be published to the world——"

"Decidedly so," interrupted the venerable stranger; "and your name will go forth as that of the zealous, trust-worthy, and highly respectable magistrate who was selected under such peculiar circumstances to receive the confession."

"Really this is no favour which you ask of me, my venerable friend," exclaimed Sir Christopher, rejoiced at the lucky chance which thus gave promise of publishing his name in so remarkable a manner. "I shall be delighted to serve you in that or any other way. When do you require me to visit these unhappy men?"

"Immediately—at once," answered the old gentleman. "My own carriage is at the door; and we can proceed to the place of destination with a privacy which the nature of the circumstances renders imperative."

Sir Christopher rose and signified his readiness to accompany his venerable visitor, the joy which he experienced entirely obliterating in his mind all remembrance of the fact that he had left Captain O'Blunderbuss in his library.

Giving his arm to his new friend, who walked with considerable difficulty, Sir Christopher led him into the hall, where the knight only stopped for a moment to take down his hat from a peg. They then issued forth together, and Sir Christopher assisted the old gentleman to ascend the steps of the vehicle which was waiting. He then leapt in himself; and the footman belonging to the carriage had just closed the door, when Captain O'Blunderbuss rushed from the house, exclaiming, "Be the powers, and this is the greatest insult 'twas ever my misfortune to mate with in all my life!"

"Oh! the dreadful man!" murmured the knight, throwing himself back in the carriage in a state of despair.

"Sir Christopher-r-r!" cried the captain, thrusting his head in at the carriage window: "Sir Christopher-r-r!" he repeated, with a terrible rattling of the r: "is this the way ye mane for to trate a gentleman? Now, be the holy poker! if ye do n't come forth and finish the little business——"

At this moment the captain was abruptly stopped short in a most unexpected manner; for the old gentleman, growing impatient of the delay, and perceiving that Sir Christopher was cruelly annoyed by the presence of the Irishman, suddenly

dealt so well applied and vigorous a blow at the gallant officer, that his countenance disappeared in an instant from the window, and he rolled back upon the pavement, exclaiming, "Blood and thunder!" in a tone of mingled rage and astonishment.

At the same moment the coachman whipped his horses, and the vehicle rolled away with extraordinary rapidity; while a merry laugh burst from the lips of the venerable old gentleman who had so successfully discomfited the warlike captain.

As soon as Sir Christopher Blunt had recovered from the alarm and excitement which the conduct of Captain O'Blunderbuss had caused him, he was seized with a strange surprise, not altogether unaccompanied by vague fear, at the sudden demonstration of vigour and strength made by his companion. This feeling was enhanced by the youthful tones of the merry laugh, which lasted long after the performance of the pleasant feat; and the knight began to tremble with apprehension, when that same mysterious companion hastily drew up the windows and the wooden blinds of the carriage, the interior thus being thrown into a state of utter darkness.

"My dear Sir Christopher Blunt," said a voice, now tremulous no more, but still evidently disguised, "you will pardon me for having practised upon you a slight deception, which would indeed have been sustained until the end of the present adventure, had not the chastisement which I was tempted to administer to that bullying fellow convinced you that I cannot be an old gentleman of four-score. In all other respects no duplicity was practised upon you; for I am a great admirer of your character—the object I have in view is precisely the one I named to you—and I selected you to receive the confessions of the two men, because I knew no magistrate better qualified to answer the purpose in every way."

A faint degree of irony marked the manner in which these last words were uttered; but Sir Christopher Blunt observed it not—for he was now a prey to oppressive fears and vague apprehensions.

"Do not alarm yourself, my dear sir," resumed the stranger: "I pledge you my most solemn word of honour that no harm shall befall you. Circumstances which I cannot disclose render it necessary to observe all possible mystery in respect to the present transaction. To you the results will be just as I ere now promised. You will receive and attest the confession of two criminals; and in forty-eight hours the contents of that confession, coupled with an account of how you became possessed of it, will appear in every London newspaper. Thence the whole transaction will be transferred to the provincial press; and in less than a week, the name of Sir Christopher Blunt, Knight, and Justice of the Peace, will be published and proclaimed throughout these islands."

"And you really mean me no harm?" said Sir Christopher, considerably re-assured as well as consoled by this intelligence.

"Give me your hand, my dear sir," exclaimed his companion. "There! And now I swear that as there is a God above us, you hold the hand of friendship in your's; and may that hand wither if I forfeit my word, or do you harm."

"I believe you, sir—I believe you," said the knight, pressing the hand which he held, with convulsive ardour. "But who are you that act thus

mysteriously? what is your name? where do you live? and whither are we going?"

"Not one of those questions can I answer," was the reply; "and it is expressly to prevent you from ascertaining the route which we are pursuing that I have drawn up the wooden blinds. I must also inform you that ere we alight at the place where you will have to receive the confession of the two men, I must bind a handkerchief over your eyes, so that you may obtain no clue to the point of our present destination. Recollect, the event of this evening will give you an immense popularity: you will become the hero of one of the most romantic—one of the most extraordinary—one of the most unheard-of adventures that have ever occurred, or will again occur in this metropolis. You will be courted by all the rank, beauty, and fashion of the West End, to learn the narrative from your own lips; and if you write a novel founded upon the occurrence," added the stranger, again in a slight tone of unperceived irony, "you will instantaneously become the most popular author of the day."

"Upon my honour—my dear sir," said Sir Christopher, rubbing his hands, "I am not altogether sorry that—that—ahem!—that you should have pitched upon me to become the hero of this adventure: at the same time you must confess that never was a hero placed in a position so well calculated to alarm him."

"The character of a hero is not to be bought cheaply in the world," observed the knight's companion. "To become such a character, one must necessarily pass through extraordinary circumstances; and extraordinary circumstances are never without their degree of excitement."

"Very true, my dear sir—very true," said Sir Christopher. "But I do not care how extraordinary the circumstances may be, so long as I run no risk. It's the risk—the danger I care about; and I shall be very happy indeed, if I can become a hero—as you are pleased to call it—without undergoing any such peril."

"You shall become a hero, Sir Christopher, without having undergone the slightest danger," returned his companion; "and that's even more than can be said by people who go up in balloons or by men who put their heads into lions' mouths in menageries."

"Upon my honour, your observations are most true—most just," exclaimed the knight, now finding himself almost completely at his ease. "I suppose that if I do get my friend Lykspittal to write me—I mean, if I do write a novel founded on the occurrences of this night, you will have no objection to my putting in all our present conversation?"

"Oh! not the least!" cried the stranger. "It is however a great pity that the night is calm, serene, and beautiful."

"Why so?" enquired Sir Christopher, in a tone of profound astonishment.

"Simply because it would be such scope for a splendid opening, if there were a fearful storm, with all the usual accessories of thunder and lightning," observed the stranger, in a cool, quiet, but dry way. "Only fancy, now, something like this:—*'It was on a dark and tempestuous night—the wind blew in fitful gusts—the artillery of heaven roared awfully—the gleaming shafts of electric fluid shot in eccentric motion across the sky;'*—and so on."

"Upon my honour, that commencement would be

truly grand!" cried the knight, altogether enraptured by the turn which his companion had given to the discourse. "And, after all, as it would be a novel, I might easily begin with the storm. Let me see—I must recollect that sentence which you composed so glibly. How did it run? Oh! I recollect.—*'It was on a dark and tempestiferous night—the wind roared—the artillery blew in fitting gusts—the streaming shafts of electricity shot across the eccentric sky.'* Eh? that will do, I think," exclaimed Sir Christopher, rubbing his hands joyously. "You see I have not got such a very bad memory, my dear sir."

"Not at all," answered the stranger; "and I should certainly advise you, Sir Christopher, not to lose sight of the novel. If you publish it by subscription, you may put down my name for half a dozen copies."

"But I do not know your name," cried the knight. "And yet," he added, after a moment's pause, "I suppose you must have one."

"I believe that I have," responded the stranger, in a tone suddenly becoming solemn—even mournful; and it struck Sir Christopher that his ear caught the sound of a half-stuffed sigh.

But he had not many instants to reflect upon this occurrence—nor even to continue the discourse upon the topic which had so much interested him; for the carriage suddenly stopped, and his companion immediately said, "Now Sir Christopher, you must permit me to blindfold you."

The operation was speedily completed; and the stranger led the knight from the vehicle, into a house, the door of which immediately closed behind them. Up a flight of stairs they then proceeded, and entered a room, where the stranger desired Sir Christopher to remove the bandage.

As soon as this was done, and the knight had recovered his powers of vision, he found himself in a well-furnished room, with the shutters closed, the curtains drawn, and a lamp standing in the middle of a table spread with wine and refreshments of a luxurious description.

His companion still retained the garb and disguise, but no longer affected the decrepitude of old age; and, seating himself with his back to the light, he invited Sir Christopher to take wine with him.

They then sat chatting for upwards of half an hour, when the sound of several footsteps ascending the stairs fell upon their ears: the door opened—and two men entered, leading between them a gentleman with a bandage over his eyes.

The two men retired,—and the stranger desired the gentleman to remove the bandage, adding, "Dr. Lascelles, you will pardon this apparent outrage, the motives of which have doubtless been explained to you by my dependants."

"I am led to believe that my presence is required to witness the confession of two criminals," said the physician, affecting complete ignorance alike of the mysterious master of the house and his affairs; "and if no treachery be intended towards me, I do not feel inclined to complain much of the treatment I have already received."

"I am delighted to hear you express yourself in these moderate terms," observed the primo mover of those widely ramified schemes which are now occupying the reader's attention. "Allow me to introduce you to a gentleman whose name is

doubtless familiar to you—Sir Christopher Blunt.” then, turning towards the knight, he added, “Sir Christopher, this is Dr. Lascelles, the eminent physician.”

“I think I have had the honour to meet Sir Christopher Blunt on a former occasion—at Lady Hatfield’s,” said the doctor, offering the knight his hand.”

“It is therefore a strange coincidence which has thus brought you together again under such circumstances as the present,” observed the stranger. “But you are both no doubt anxious to depart hence as speedily as possible, and I will not detain you longer than is absolutely necessary.”

He then rang a bell; and in a few minutes four of his dependants entered the room, leading in Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler, both strongly bound with cords, and having handkerchiefs over their eyes. These bandages were removed—the two villains cast rapid and searching glances around them—the stranger ordered them to be seated and his dependants to retire—and the business of that memorable night commenced.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE CONFESSION.

“SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT,” said the stranger, “in your capacity of one of his Majesty’s Justices of the Peace, you will have the kindness to receive the confession of the two men now before you; and you, Dr. Lascelles, as a gentleman of the highest respectability, will witness the present proceedings.”

Thus speaking, he drew a writing-table close up to the place where Sir Christopher Blunt was sitting; and the knight, inflated with the pride of his official station, and conscious of the importance of the part which he was now enacting, assumed as dignified and solemn a deportment as possible. A Bible was produced; and he directed the two prisoners to be sworn, the stranger administering the oath.

“Now, my men,” said the Justice of the Peace, “it is my duty to hear and receive any confession which you may have to make to me. But I give you due warning that it is to be published, and, from what I have already been told, will be used elsewhere. Remember, also, that you are now upon your oaths; and you must consider yourselves in just the same position as if you were in a regular police-court, under usual circumstances.”

Having thus delivered himself of what he believed to be an admirable prelude to the proceedings, Sir Christopher glanced complacently towards Dr. Lascelles, as much as to say, “That was rather good, I flatter myself;” and the physician responded with a sign of approval. The knight then fixed his eyes in a searching manner upon the two prisoners, who, however, appeared to be much less in awe of the magisterial dignity than of the presence of the mysterious stranger, at whom they from time to time cast furtive looks of terror and supplication.

“Sir Christopher Blunt,” said that individual, who throughout the proceedings spoke in a feigned tone, and sate in such a manner that the light

never once fell fully upon his countenance, “it is now necessary to remind you that a gentleman with whom you are well acquainted, and whose name is Torrens, is now in a criminal gaol, charged with the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay.”

“I heard the news with grief, and indeed with incredulity as to the truth of the accusation,” observed the knight.

“Ask those men, sir,” said the stranger, in a low and impressive voice, “what they know of that foul assassination.”

“God bless me!” exclaimed Sir Christopher, much agitated: “surely these men now before me are not the—the —”

“The real murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay!” added the stranger solemnly.

“Is this possible?” cried the Justice of the Peace, surveying the prisoners with apprehension and horror.

“That’s the confession we have to make, your worship,” said Tim the Snammer, in a dogged tone.

“Dreadful! dreadful!” murmured the knight; then, somewhat mastering his emotions, he asked, “What is your name?”

“Timothy Splint, your worship,” was the reply.

“And your’s?” demanded Sir Christopher, making notes as he proceeded.

“Joshua Pedler, your worship.”

“Where do you live?—and what are you?” were the next questions.

“Where we *did* live, your worship means,” said Tim the Snammer; “but it doesn’t much signify answering that query—since we don’t live now where we used to do; and as for what we are, your worship can pretty well guess, now that we’ve confessed having murdered Sir Henry Courtenay—which was all through a mistake.”

“A mistake!” repeated Sir Christopher.

“Yes, sir,” continued the Snammer; “and I’ll tell you all about it.”

“Speak slow—very slow,” said the knight; “because I shall commit to paper every word you utter, remember.”

“Well, sir,” resumed Timothy Splint; “it happened in this way. Me and my companion here, Joshua Pedler, took it into our heads to break into Torrens Cottage, for no good purpose, as you may suppose.”

“To rob the house—eh?” said Sir Christopher.

“Just so, your worship. Well, we reached the Cottage between twelve and one o’clock at night—or nearer one, I should think—and looking through the chinks of the shutters, for there was a light in the parlour, we saw a pile of gold and a heap of notes on the table, and a gentleman asleep on the sofa.”

“You follow this man, Dr. Lascelles?” said Sir Christopher, turning towards the physician.

“Word for word,” was the reply.

“Go on, then,” exclaimed the knight.

“We opened the front-door in a jiffy, your worship, and without making any noise,” continued Splint; “and we went into the parlour. Josh Pedler secured the notes and gold; and I held my clasp-knife close to the throat of the gentleman sleeping on the sofa.”

“Did you know who he was?” demanded the knight.

“Not a bit of it, your worship. We took him for Mr. Torrens, as a matter of course,” continued the

Snammer. "Josh Pedler went to ransack the side-board, and upset a sugar-basin, or some such thing in the drawer. The gentleman awoke, and was just on the point of crying out, when I drew the clasp-knife across his throat."

"Merciful goodness!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, shuddering from head to foot, and glancing uneasily around him.

"Shocking! shocking!" said the doctor, with unfeigned emotion.

"The very knife that I did it with was in my pocket," observed Tim the Snammer, "when we was made prisoners and brought here."

The stranger, who had remained silent for some time, now rose from his seat, and took from the mantel the fatal weapon, which he laid upon the table before Sir Christopher, saying, "This is collateral evidence of the truth of the deposition now made."

"Well, upon my honour," observed the knight, recoiling from the ominous-looking instrument, "I have commenced my magisterial functions in an extraordinary—I may say, unheard-of manner. But let the prisoner proceed with his confession."

"I've very little more to say, your worship," answered the Snammer. "As soon as the deed was done, I could have wished it to be undone; and I know that my companion in trouble here, wished the same. We didn't go with the intention of doing it; it came upon us by itself, like—and I hope mercy will be showed us," he added, with a significant glance of appeal towards the mysterious individual of whom he seemed to be so much in awe.

"You and your comrade then left the house immediately, I suppose?" said Sir Christopher, interrogatively.

"Exactly so, your worship," replied Timothy Splint.

"And do you," continued the knight, addressing himself to Joshua Pedler, "admit the truth of all that your companion now states?"

"Every word of it, your worship," answered the man.

"We must therefore suppose," observed Dr. Lascelles, "that Mr. Torrens, upon discovering the dreadful deed, feared lest suspicion should fall upon himself, and buried the corpse in the garden where it was found."

"True!" said Sir Christopher. "And now, Joshua Pedler, you will inform me what you did with the money which you took away with you."

"I divided it, sir; and the big notes was changed into small ones," was the answer. "When me and my companion here was made prisoners, we had ever so much of the money about us; and it was took from us."

The stranger produced from his pocket a small parcel which he handed to Sir Christopher, saying, "There is the amount taken from the two prisoners."

"Very good," said Sir Christopher: then, after a few moments' profound reflection, he turned towards Dr. Lascelles, in whose ear he whispered these words, "To me it is very clear that those men have confessed the truth, and that they are the dreadful villains they represent themselves to be. But, as this statement is to be published, in connexion with our names, we must render the evidence *against* those fellows as complete and satisfactory as possible."

"I am perfectly of your way of thinking, Sir Christopher," returned the doctor, also speaking in a low whisper. "Since we are here on such an unpleasant business, we must do our duty effectually."

"Then those men should be examined separately in respect to the very minutest details of their self-accusing evidence," said the knight, still addressing himself in an under-tone to the physician; "or else the world will immediately declare that the whole thing was a mere farce, contrived by some of Torrens' friends to save him, and of which you and I were the dupes and the instruments."

"A very just fear on your part, Sir Christopher," observed the doctor, who, from the little he knew of the knight, would not have given him credit for so much penetration and forethought.

"But—but," said Sir Christopher, "I hardly like to propose it to the gentleman who had us brought here—"

"Oh! I will take that duty upon myself," interrupted Dr. Lascelles; and, immediately turning towards the stranger—who was however no stranger to him—he said in a loud and firm tone, "We wish to examine these men separately."

"Certainly," was the reply; and the mysterious master of the house forthwith rang the bell.

Wilton answered the summons, and was ordered to conduct Joshua Pedler into an adjoining room.

When this command was obeyed, and the domestic had led the prisoner away, Sir Christopher proceeded to question Timothy Splint again.

"You said just now that when you looked through the window, you saw a gentleman sleeping on the sofa? Now, did your companion also peep through the crevices in the shutters?"

"He did, your worship," was the answer.

"And which way was the gentleman lying?"

"With his feet towards the window, and his head on that end of the sofa which was nearest to the door."

"And when you both went into the house, who entered first?"

"Myself, your worship."

"And when you went away again, who departed first?"

"I think Josh Pedler was in advance—in fact, I'm sure he was, because I remember shutting the front-door behind me."

"Which side of the table were the pile of gold and the heap of notes on?" inquired Sir Christopher, racking his brain for as many minute questions as possible.

"The money was all lying on a large book at that end of the table next to the window, your worship," responded Tim the Snammer.

The knight put several other queries of the same trivial, but really important nature; and Splint was then removed from the room, Joshua Pedler being led back again to his place.

Precisely the same questions which had been asked of the Snammer, were now put to the other villain; and the answers corresponded in the minutest particulars.

"There is no possibility of doubt as to the genuine character of the present scene," whispered the knight to Dr. Lascelles.

"I have been all along of that way of thinking," replied the physician. "At the same time I admire the precautions you have adopted, Sir Christopher, and the skilful manner in which you have examined

and cross-examined these self-inculpatory scoundrels."

"You really are of opinion that I have done the thing well—eh, doctor?" said the Justice of the Peace, with a complacent smile. "Well—I am rejoiced to perceive that I have given you satisfaction. Our unknown friend there may now have the other villain brought back again; so that the two partners in crime may sign these depositions."

Dr. Lascelles intimated the knight's desire to the stranger, who forthwith caused Tim the Snammer to be reconducted to his place in the room where this extraordinary scene was enacted.

Sir Christopher then read over, in a slow and measured tone, the whole of his notes—containing the voluntary confession of the miscreants, and the subsequent examination.

"You, Timothy Splint, and you, Joshua Pedler," he said, when that task was accomplished, "will now sign, or otherwise attest, this document."

The unknown rang the bell twice, and the four dependants who had conducted the two prisoners into the room in the first instance, immediately re-appeared; and, on a signal from their master, they loosened the cords which confined the hands of the villains, in such a way that the latter were enabled to affix their signatures to the depositions, Dr. Lascelles acting as the witness.

"You may now remove those men altogether," said the unknown.

The four dependants immediately blindfolded them, and led them away from the apartment, carefully closing the door behind them.

"I presume that Sir Christopher Blunt and myself are now at liberty to depart?" said the doctor.

"Not before you have each given me a solemn pledge that you will not publish nor even hint at the occurrences of this night until twenty-four hours shall have elapsed," returned the stranger.

"For my part I don't at all object to give the promise required," exclaimed the knight hastily, for the mystery of the whole proceeding laid imposed him with the utmost awe in respect to the unknown.

"And I will as readily pledge my solemn word of honour to maintain that condition," observed the doctor.

"In that case, gentlemen," said the stranger, "you shall be conveyed hence without delay. I need hardly enjoin you to use that confession, which you will take away with you, in the manner alone calculated to save the life of Mr. Torrens and relieve him from the dreadful charge hanging over his head."

"Rest assured that all shall be done which the emergency of the case requires, and which we have now the means to effect," said Sir Christopher. "And now, with your permission, I shall take a draught of wine and water—for I feel somewhat exhausted with these proceedings."

While Sir Christopher was helping himself at the table, Dr. Lascelles stepped up to the individual whom circumstances compel us to denominate "the stranger" or "the unknown," and said in a low and hasty whisper, "What is the reason of this delay of twenty-four hours in respect to the proclamation of Torrens' innocence?"

"Because Old Death and others must be in my power, ere the occurrences of this might be published," was the answer, likewise spoken in a hur-

ried whisper; "or else *they* will suspect *where* these scenes have been enacted."

"But are you sure of capturing them?" demanded Lascelles.

"Confident," was the brief but emphatic reply.

The unknown then rang the bell, and significantly intimated to Wilton, who answered the summons, that his guests were ready to depart. The domestic bowed and withdrew: but in a few minutes he returned, accompanied by another dependant; and the two domestics proceeded to blindfold both the doctor and the knight, the unknown apologising for the necessity of renewing this process. He himself then conducted them to the carriage which Wilton had ordered round to the door, and into which the stranger followed them.

It then drove away at a rapid rate; and, after taking sundry windings, stopped, at the expiration of an hour, opposite St. James's church, Piccadilly, just as the clock struck two in the morning.

The knight and the doctor descended, having already bade farewell to the mysterious individual whom they left inside; and the carriage instantaneously drove off.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEWGATE.

YES—'twas two o'clock in the morning; and the hour was proclaimed by the iron tongues of Time, from the thousand steeples of the mighty metropolis.

How solemnly does the sound of those deep, sonorous, metallic notes break upon the dead silence of that period when darkness spreads its sable wing over an entire hemisphere!

And though 'tis the time for rest, yet repose and slumber are not the companions of every couch.

Crime, sickness, and sorrow close not their lids in balmy sleep, weighed down with weariness though they be: too much happiness has likewise an excitement hostile to the serenity of the pillow.

For sleep is a fickle goddess, who succumbs not to every one's wooing at the hour when her yielding is most desired: now coy and coquettish, she hovers around, yet approaches not quite close;—now sternly and inexorably obstinate, she keeps herself at a great distance, in sullen mood.

And when the iron tongues of Time proclaimed the hour of two, were the eyes of the wretched Torrens or his miserable, guilty wife closed in slumber?

No—no: beneath the same roof, though in compartments far asunder, they writhed and tossed upon their hard pallets, in feverish excitement—craving longing for sleep to visit them,—and sleep would not!

In those hours of wakefulness, and amidst the solemn stillness and utter darkness of the night, how terrible are the trains of thought which pass in rapid procession through the guilty mind,—as if imagination itself were being hurried along an endless avenue of horrors—grim spectres, hideous phantoms, and appalling sights on the one hand and on the other!

Then with what tremendous speed does memory travel back through the vista of a mis-pent life, all the foul deeds of which become personified in frightful shapes, and muster themselves in terrible array on either side!



In his narrow stone-cell, the wretched Torrens felt as if he were in a coffin, suffocated, hemmed in around;—and yet his imagination possessed boundless space wherein to raise up the awful shapes that haunted his pillow.

Was it possible that he was there—in Newgate? Did he dream—was he the sport of a hideous phantasy? Could it be true that he was dragged away from his comfortable home—snatched as it were suddenly from the world itself—and flung into a felon's dungeon?

No—no: it was impossible—absurd. Ha! ha! the folly of the idea was enough to make one laugh!

But—oh! merciful heavens!—he extended his arms, and his hands touched the cold—rugged—uneven wall: thence they wandered to the iron of the bed-stead—and came in contact with the coarse horse-cloth which covered his burning, feverish limbs!

Then a dreadful groan burst from him,—a groan which, even were he ten thousand, thousand times more guilty than he really was, would have been lamentable, heart-rending to hear,—a groan of such ineffable anguish that Satan himself might have said, "This man hath suffered enough!"

Suffered!—holy God, how deeply—deeply has he suffered since the massive door of that mighty stone sepulchre first closed upon him,—appearing to shut out the pure air of heaven, the golden light of day, and to mark a point where even human sympathies could follow no farther!

Suffered!—the wretched felon whose foot is upon the first step of the scaffold, never suffered more than the crushed, ruined, accused Torrens;—for all his guilt had arisen from the lack of moral courage to meet misfortune face to face; and now that misfortune had thrust itself upon him, and compelled him to gaze on its pale and death-like countenance, he was completely weighed down.

His infamy in respect to Rosamond, lay as heavily upon his conscience as would have lain the crime of murder, had he really perpetrated it; and he suffered more on account of the deed which he had committed, but for which the law *had not* touched him, than on account of the charge of which he was innocent, but for which the law *had* seized upon him.

Miserable—miserable man! Darkness—silence—and sleeplessness were indeed terrible to him,—so terrible that, as he lay tossing upon his feverish

pallet, he wished that he was dead:—yet, had he possessed the means of inflicting self-destruction, he would have been afraid to die!

He was not placed in a ward along with other prisoners; because the charge against him was so black and terrible—the charge of murder—that he was lodged in a dungeon by himself—a cell that had seen many, many previous occupants, most of whom had gone forth to the scaffold!

For in Newgate the possession of a room to oneself—if a room such a coffin of masonry can be called—is the horrible privilege of him who is accused of murder; and those whose alleged offences are of a less deep dye, herd together in common wards, where a fetid atmosphere is the medium of communicating the foulest ideas that words can convey or ears receive.

Oh! what a plague-spot is that horrible gaol—that pandemonium of Newgate—upon the civilisation of the metropolis of these realms

Shame—shame, that it should be allowed to exist under the management of an incapable, ignorant, and monstrously corrupt body—the Aldermen of London:—shame, shame that it should be permitted to remain as a frightful abuse of local jurisdiction, just because no statesman has yet been found bold enough to wrest a barbarian charter from an overgrown, bloated, and despicable corporation!

The wife—the newly married wife of Mr. Torrens,—that woman so well known to our readers by the name of Martha Slingsby,—was not lodged by herself:—being accused of a crime one degree less heinous than that of murder, she was placed in a ward with several other females.

And she also heard the iron tongue of Time proclaim the hour of two in the morning;—and she also tossed upon a hard, sleepless, and feverish pallet.

For she had not even the solace of conscious innocence as an anodyne for her lacerated heart and wounded spirit: she knew that she was guilty of the crime imputed to her—and that knowledge lay upon her soul like a weight of lead.

And—O horror! she was well aware that the black deed of forgery would be indubitably fixed upon her: and the penalty of that deed was—*death!*

Yes:—death by the hand of the common executioner—an ignominious death upon the scaffold!

She knew that almost her very minutes were now numbered—that, as the clock struck eight on some Monday morning, not very far distant, she must be led forth to die—that after her trial, which was sure to end in her condemnation, she should be consigned to the condemned cell—that from this cell she must proceed through several dark and dismal passages to that door upon whose very threshold would appear the gibbet, black and sinister—that she would have to ascend, or perhaps be carried up, the steps to the platform of the horrible machine—that she should see myriads and myriads of human beings crowding around to behold her dying agonies—that she would be placed upon a drop soon to glide away from beneath her feet and leave her suspended in the air—that the few minutes during which she must stand upon that drop, while the chaplain said the parting prayer, would comprise whole years, aye, centuries of the bitterest, bitterest anguish—that her attentive ear would catch even the sound caused by the finger of the executioner,

when he touched the bolt of the drop an instant before he pulled it back—and that her soul would be yielded up in the agonies of strangulation!

Thus—thus, in spite of herself, did the wretched woman's imagination picture in frightful detail the whole of the dreadful ceremony of a violent death: thus—thus did she shadow forth, in imagination, every feature—every minute particular of the appalling ordeal;—and, in imagination also, did she now pass through it all, as vainly she craved for sleep in the silence and the darkness of the prison-ward!

The dread routine of the whole ceremony assumed an historical exactitude, a palpable shape, and a frightful reality in her mind.

Terrible—terrible was it for her to think upon what she now was, and upon what she might have been.

Not a hope was left to her in this world: she must be cut off in the meridian of her years;—she must bid adieu for ever to all the pleasures, the enjoyments, the delights of society and of life!

Oh! for the power—oh! for the means to avert her maddening, harrowing thoughts from the prophetic contemplation of that fatal morning when she must walk forth to the scaffold—when the close air of that prison would suddenly change to the fresh breeze of heaven, as she stepped forth from the low dark door which the passer-by outside ever beholds with a shudder,—and when she should raise her eyes to that black and ominous frame-work, with the chain hanging from the cross-beam, and her own coffin beneath the drop! All this was horrible—horrible,—sufficient to deprive the strongest mind of its reasoning faculties, and to paralyse the boldest with excess of terror!

For, oh! the reward of crime is dispensed in two ways upon earth,—by the law, and by the criminal's own thoughts;—and far—far more dreadful is the punishment inflicted by the guilty conscience than by the vengeance of outraged justice. Even the horrors of the scaffold, immense—tremendous though they must be in the reality, are magnified a hundred-fold by the terror-stricken imagination!

From the examples of the wretched man and the guilty woman of whom we have been speaking, and on whose heads afflictions and miseries fell with such frightful rapidity and crushing weight,—from their examples let the reader judge of the *folly*—setting aside the *wickedness*—of crime.

Gold—deceitful gold—was the will-o'-the-wisp which led them on through the devious ways of iniquity, until they suddenly found themselves in Newgate!

For the woman forged for gold—and the man sold his daughter's virtue for gold; and from the moment when Torrens consented to that vile deed, every thing went worse with him—nothing was bettered—and the circumstances resulting from that one act, combined to overwhelm him with afflictions, and even to fix upon him a horrible charge of which he was really innocent!

To err, then, is to be foolish, as well as wicked;—and this grand truth has doubtless been felt and acknowledged, when too late, by many and many a wretched being within those very walls and that sombre enclosure of Newgate!

Newgate!—what numberless ties have been severed on its threshold;—and what countless thousands of individuals, on entering that dread

portal one by one, have gnashed their teeth with rage at the folly, even though they have felt no compunction for the guilt, of the career which they pursued and which had its natural ending there!

It was ten o'clock in the morning, when a hackney-coach stopped at the door of the governor's house, which stands in the centre of the front part of Newgate; and a fine, tall, handsome young man, having leapt forth, assisted a closely veiled lady to alight from the vehicle.

They were almost immediately admitted into the office of the governor, the young lady clinging to her companion's arm for support, for she was labouring under the most dreadful mental anguish.

These persons were Clarence Villiers and his beautiful bride, Adelaïs.

Returning from Devonshire, whither they had been to pass the honeymoon, they heard on the road, ere they reached the metropolis, the astounding intelligence that the aunt of the one had been committed to Newgate on a charge of forgery, and that the father of the other was consigned to the same place under an accusation of the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay. They also learnt at the same moment and for the first time, that the wretched pair had only just been united in matrimonial bonds when this fearful fate overtook them; but they were too much shocked by the more grave and serious portion of the tidings which thus burst upon them, to give themselves even leisure to express their surprise at the less important incident of the marriage of Mr. Torrens and Mrs. Slingsby.

They had arrived in London on the preceding evening, and had repaired direct to Torrens Cottage, hoping—and, indeed, expecting as a matter of course—to find Rosamond there.

But they were disappointed—cruelly disappointed in that anticipation!

The female servant and the lad were, however, still at the Cottage; and from the former they learnt tidings which enhanced, if possible, the grief that already rent the heart of Adelaïs, and which excited vague but terrible suspicions in the mind of Clarence.

For the servant informed them that Miss Rosamond went to stay with Mrs. Slingsby almost immediately after the wedding—that she remained there almost ten days, and came home the very night when the murder was committed, and seemed dreadfully unhappy during the short time that she did remain at the Cottage—and that she departed no one knew whither, the second day after her return, leaving a note for her father.

While Adelaïs sat weeping at these tidings, to her so completely inexplicable, a torrent of suspicions and terrible ideas rolled through the mind of her husband Clarence. For he knew—as the reader will remember—that Sir Henry Courtenay was not only the paramour of his aunt, but that he had likewise cast lustful looks upon Rosamond; and he was equally aware that the young girl's imagination had been excited and inflamed by the false representations his aunt had made in respect to the character of the baronet. Then that second visit of Rosamond to Old Burlington Street—her unhappiness on returning home—the assassination of Sir Henry Courtenay at Torrens Cottage—the sudden marriage of

two persons who were almost entire strangers to each other—and the contemporaneous flight of Rosamond from her home,—all these incidents seemed of so suspicious and terribly mysterious a nature as to strike Clarence with dismay.

The version which Mr. Torrens had given Rosamond of the particulars of the murder—and which, as the reader is aware, was the true one so far as the actual perpetration of the deed itself was concerned—was unknown to Clarence, inasmuch as it had not been published in the newspapers;—for, when arrested by Dykes and Bingham, Mr. Torrens had immediately sent for able counsel, to whom he told his story previously to the examination before the magistrate, and by the advice of his legal assistant, the prisoner had contented himself by simply declaring his innocence, stating that he should reserve for his defence the explanations whereon that assertion was founded.

Thus Clarence Villiers could not help believing that Torrens was really guilty of the murder; and he shuddered at the idea which forced itself upon him, that his aunt was an accomplice in the crime. In fact, it naturally appeared as if that woman and that man had suddenly blended their congenial spirits for the purpose of working out deeds of the blackest dye; and he dreaded lest the honour of Rosamond had been wrecked in the frightful convulsion produced by that association.

But none of his awful misgivings did he impart to Adelaïs. On the contrary, he strove to console her by assurances of his hope that her father must be the victim of a terrible junction of adverse circumstances, and that his innocence would yet transpire. Such ideas he was in reality very far from entertaining,—but it cut him to the quick to behold the anguish of his young wife—and he uttered every thing of a consolatory nature which his imagination was likely in such a case to suggest as a means of imparting hope and affording comfort.

They remained at the Cottage that night; and on the ensuing morning repaired to Newgate, as we have already stated.

The governor, upon learning the degree of relationship in which Mrs. Villiers stood towards Mr. Torrens, expressed himself in terms of the kindest sympathy, and offered to proceed in the first instance to the prisoner's cell to prepare him for the meeting with his daughter and son-in-law. This proposal was thankfully accepted; and the governor, after remaining absent for about ten minutes, returned to conduct the young couple into the presence of the prisoner, with whom he left them.

Adelaïs threw herself into her father's arms, embraced him with a fondness that was almost wild and frantic, and sobbed bitterly upon his breast,—while Clarence Villiers stood a deeply affected spectator of the sad—the touching scene.

"My child—my dear child," exclaimed the father, more moved by paternal tenderness than he ever yet had been,—*"I am innocent—I am innocent!"*

"Almighty God be thanked for that assurance!" murmured Adelaïs, as she fell upon her knees, and bent her burning face over her father's emaciated hands;—for Mr. Torrens had become frightfully thin—altered—and care-worn,—and his entire appearance denoted how acute his mental sufferings had been.

"Clarence," he cried, after a few moments' pause, during which he raised his daughter and placed

her upon a seat,—"Clarence, did you hear my declaration? I am innocent!"

"I heard it—and I rejoice unfeignedly—oh! most unfeignedly," returned the young man, not knowing what to think, but speaking thus to console his heart-wrung wife.

"But whether I can prove my innocence—whether I can triumph over the awful weight of circumstantial evidence which has accumulated against me," continued Mr. Torrens, "is a point which God alone can determine."

An ejaculation of despair burst from the lips of Adelaïs.

"For heaven's sake, compose yourself, dearest!" said Villiers. "You have heard your father declare his innocence—"

"Yes—yes," she cried: "but if the world will not believe him? It is not sufficient that *we* should be convinced of that innocence! Oh! my God—wherefore has this terrible affliction fallen upon us?"—then, suddenly struck by another idea, she exclaimed, "And Rosamond, dear father—what has become of my sister Rosamond?"

Mr. Torrens turned away, and burst into tears—for that question revived a thousand agonising reminiscences in his mind.

"My father *here*—my sister *gone*," mused Adelaïs, her manner suddenly becoming strangely subdued, and the wild intensity of her earnest eyes changing in a moment to an expression of idiotic vacancy;—"and Clarence—where is he? Methought he was with me just now—"

"Merciful God! her senses are leaving her!" exclaimed Villiers, in a frantic tone: then, throwing his arms around her, he said, "Adelaïs—my beloved Adelaïs—Clarence is here—by your side! Oh! look not at me so strangely, Adelaïs—do you not know me?—speak—speak!—I am Clarence—your husband—he who loves, who adores you! My God! she does not recognise me!"

And the young man started back, dashing his right hand with the violence of despair against his forehead; while Adelaïs remained motionless in the chair, gazing on him with a kind of vacant wonderment,—and the miserable father staggered against the wall for support, murmuring in a tone of ineffable emotion, "Great God! where will all this end?"

But at that moment the heavy bolts were drawn back—the door opened—Adelaïs uttered a scream of mingled amazement and delight—and in an instant Rosamond was clasped in her arms.

Long and fervent was that embrace on the part of the sisters: nor were Torrens and Clarence Villiers alone the witnesses thereof—for the heavy door of the stone cell had, ere it closed again, given admittance to Esther de Medina.

Fortunate for Adelaïs was it that Rosamond appeared at such a moment,—a moment when the reason of the young bride was rocking on its throne, and the weight of an idea no heavier than a hair would decide whether it were to be re-established on its seat or overturned for ever!

Faint and overcome by the sudden revulsion of feeling produced by this sudden meeting with her sister, Adelaïs slowly disengaged herself from Rosamond's arms, and falling back in the chair, beckoned Clarence towards her, saying, "My dearest husband—keep near me—stay with me—for I know not what dreadful ideas have been passing in my

mind;—and it seemed to me for a time that I was in utter darkness—or that I was buried in a profound sleep."

"But you are better now, dearest?" exclaimed Clarence, overjoyed at this sudden return of her senses.

"Yes—I am better now," said Adelaïs; and, falling upon her husband's neck, she burst into a flood of tears.

Meantime Rosamond was weeping also in her father's arms; and the eyes of the generous-hearted—the amiable Esther de Medina were overflowing at the contemplation of this mournful and touching scene.

"Father—father," murmured Rosamond, her voice almost suffocated with the sobs which agitated her bosom,—“there is hope—every hope—”

"Hope!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens, catching at the word as if the halter were already round his neck and the cry of "a reprieve!" had fallen on his ears.

"Hope, did you say?" exclaimed Adelaïs, now so completely relieved by the issue her pent-up anguish and shocked feelings had found in copious weeping, that all the clearness of her intellect had returned.

"Hush—Rosamond!" said Miss de Medina, advancing towards the group: "hush—my dear madam," she added, turning hastily towards Adelaïs; "that word must not be breathed here aloud yet! Nevertheless, it is true that there *is* hope—and every hope—nay, even certainty—"

"Great God! I thank thee!" cried Adelaïs, clasping her hands together in fervent gratitude, while Mr. Torrens was so overcome by emotions of joy and amazement that he sank upon that prison-pallet whereon he had passed a night of such horrible watchfulness.

"I implore you to restrain your feelings as much as possible," said Esther, speaking in a low and mysterious tone, which made Torrens, Clarence, and Adelaïs suddenly become all attention and breathless suspense; "the proofs of your innocence, sir," she added, looking at the prisoner, "have been obtained! Nay—give utterance to no ejaculation—but hear me in silence! Within twenty-four hours from this time your guiltlessness will be proclaimed to the world. Already are the proofs in the hands of a magistrate but circumstances, with which I am not myself altogether acquainted, render that delay imperiously necessary. It would, however, have been cruel to have left you in ignorance of this important circumstance; and—"

"And this admirable young lady, at whose father's house I found a home," hastily added Rosamond, "would not refuse me the joy—the indescribable joy of being the bearer of these tidings. Nay—more! she offered to accompany me—"

"God will reward you for all your kindness to my sister, dear lady," said Adelaïs, embracing Esther with heart-felt gratitude and affection.

"You are doubtless anxious to learn how the proofs of Mr. Torrens' innocence have been obtained," resumed Esther, after a pause—"but my explanation must be very brief. Suffice it to say that in this mighty metropolis, which contains so much evil, there is a man bent only on doing good. Accident revealed to him certain particulars which convinced him of your innocence, sir," continued the beautiful Jewess, addressing herself now especially to Mr. Torrens: "upon the information which

he thus received, he acted—and he has succeeded in obtaining and placing in the hands of a Justice of the Peace the confession of the real perpetrators of the awful deed——”

“Then the murderers are in custody, doubtless?” exclaimed Clarence, astonished and delighted at all he heard.

“They are not in the grasp of justice,” answered Esther. “But on this head you must ask me no questions. Rest satisfied with the assurance that the innocence of Mr. Torrens will completely and unquestionably transpire—that he will soon be restored to you all—and that his secret friend watches over him even from a distance. Who that individual is, you cannot know—and perhaps never may. All the recompense he demands at your hands is the subduing in your minds of every sentiment of curiosity that may prompt you to pierce the mystery which shrouds his actions; and remember also that every syllable I have now uttered, is to remain a secret profoundly locked up in your own breasts until the proclamation of innocence shall be made from that quarter to which the solemn duty of publishing it has been entrusted.”

“We should be wanting in common gratitude, indeed, to him who has thus interested himself in behalf of the innocent, were we to act in opposition to those injunctions,” said Clarence Villiers. “But through you, lady, do we each and all convey our heartfelt thanks for that generous intervention which is to produce so vitally important a result.”

“Yes—and to you also, dearest Miss de Medina, is our eternal gratitude due!” exclaimed Rosamond—an assurance that was immediately and sincerely echoed by Adelaïs, Clarence, and Mr. Torrens.

Hope had now returned to that prison-cell,—hope in all her radiance and her glory,—with her smiling countenance and her cheering influence!

The name of Mrs. Torrens—late Mrs. Slingsby—was not mentioned by a soul during this meeting: her husband uttered it not—Clarence, through motives of delicacy, remained silent likewise in that respect—and the sisters had too much to occupy their thoughts relative to their father’s position and the hope of his speedy release, to devote a moment’s attention to that woman.

For the interview was necessarily short, in consequence of the severity of the prison regulations; but when Mr. Torrens was again alone in his cell, he could scarcely believe that so sudden a change had taken place in his prospects.

On leaving the gaol, after having taken a tender and affectionate leave of their father, the sisters looked inquiringly at each other, as if to ask whither each was going.

“We have taken up our abode at the Cottage,” said Adelaïs, breaking silence; “where we shall remain, doubtless,” she added, glancing towards her husband, “until our father shall be restored to us.”

Clarence signified his assent.

“I should be grieved to separate you from your sister immediately after your unexpected meeting to-day,” said Esther, addressing herself to Adelaïs; “but if Rosamond will continue to make our house her home——”

“Yes—yes, my dear friend,” exclaimed Rosamond, hastily: “I will intrude a little longer upon your hospitality—for I feel that my nerves have been too much shaken by recent occurrences to allow me to return to the Cottage, at least for the present.”

The reader need scarcely be informed that the young lady desired to avoid the painful prospect of being alone with her sister and Clarence: for what explanation could she give of her flight from home?—an explanation which she knew would naturally be required of her.

Adelaïs, indeed, felt somewhat hurt at the decision which her sister had made in respect to remaining with Miss de Medina: but she concealed her vexation, and they parted with an affectionate embrace.

Thus, Clarence and Adelaïs proceeded to Torrens Cottage, while Esther and Rosamond returned in Mr. de Medina’s carriage to Finchley Manor.

During their ride home in the hackney-coach, Villiers and his wife discussed all the incidents which had just occurred; but during a pause in the conversation, Adelaïs bethought herself for the first time that day of her mother-in-law.

“Clarence,” she said, laying her hand upon her husband’s arm, “we have been sadly culpable——”

“I know to what you would allude, dearest,” interrupted Villiers. “To-morrow I shall call upon my wretched aunt; but it is by no means necessary for you to accompany me. Your father did not once mention her name during the interview: we will not seek to penetrate his motives for that silence—but we will endeavour to imitate him in that respect, as much as possible.”

“I do not clearly understand you, Clarence” said Adelaïs, gazing at him enquiringly.

“I mean that the less we speak concerning my aunt, the more prudent it will be, my love,” responded Villiers; “for I fear that *she* will not prove to be innocent of the crime imputed to her—and, under all circumstances, you can owe her no sympathy nor respect, either as my relative or your mother-in-law.”

Adelaïs made no answer; and Clarence immediately changed the conversation.

CHAPTER XCIV.

“THE STOUT HOUSE.”

LONDON is a wondrous city for the success with which the most flagrant quackery is accomplished. Things not only improbable, but absolutely impossible, are puffed off with matchless impudence; and, what is more extraordinary still, they obtain an infinite number of believers. Thus we have snuffs which will cure blindness when the most skilful oculists are at fault,—oils and pomatums that will make the hair grow in spite of nature’s denial,—cosmetics that will render every skin, though tawny as a gipsy’s, white as a Circassian’s,—pills so happily compounded as to be an universal panacea, annihilating diseases of even the most opposite characters, and effecting for thirteen-pence halfpenny what all the College of Physicians could not accomplish for millions,—lozenges by which a voice cracked like a tin-trumpet, may become melodious as a silver bell,—ointments that will cure in a week ulcers and sores which have baffled all the experience of famous hospital-surgeons for a quarter of a century,—decoctions prepared on purpose to prolong life, although the *elixir vitae* of the alchemists has long been regarded as an absurd fable,—boluses competent to restore to all their pristine

rigour constitutions shattered by years and years of dissipation and dissolute habits,—pulmonic wafers efficient to wrestle against the very last stage of consumption, and restore lungs entirely eaten away,—tonics so wonderful that they will even give new coats to the stomach, though the old ones have been destroyed by ardent spirits,—and heaven only knows how many more blessings of the same kind!

Seriously speaking, it is deplorable to perceive how tremendously the millions are gulled by all these details of an impudent and most dishonest quackery. The coiner who passes off a base shilling, representing it to be a good one, is punished as a felon and stigmatised as a villain. But the quack who sells articles which he announces to be capable of performing physical impossibilities, is not tangible by the law, nor does he become branded in the opinion of the world. Such are the conventional differences existing in civilised society!

Of all the demoralising species of quackery practised now-a-days, certain medical works are decidedly the worst. We allude to those beastly things which are constantly announced in the advertisement-department of newspapers, but which, with a scintillation of good taste on the side of the printers, are invariably huddled together in the most obscure nook. It is evident that newspaper-proprietors are ashamed of the filthy advertisements, although they cannot very well refuse to insert them. But we warn all our readers against suffering themselves to put the least confidence in the representations set forth in the announcements alluded to. The works thus puffed off are contemptible as regards medical information, demoralising in their very nature, and delusive in all their promises.

An amusing species of quackery exists with respect to many public-houses. Passing along a thoroughfare, or visiting some fresh neighbourhood springing up in the outskirts of the metropolis, you will probably see a new building, destined for the "public" line, and with the words—"NOTED STOUT HOUSE"—painted on a board, or cut in the masonry. The cool impudence of proclaiming an establishment to be famous for a particular article, before it is even finished, is too ludicrous to provoke serious vituperation. The merit of the place is agreed upon beforehand between the architect and the proprietor. Never mind how worthless the beer to be retailed there may eventually prove, it is a Noted Stout House all the same! But so accustomed are the inhabitants of London to behold such things, that the springing up of such a structure causes no sensation in its neighbourhood: good, easy people that we are now-a-days—we take every thing for granted and as a matter of course!

The *Noted Stout House* in Helmet Row, St. Luke's—called by its patrons, for abbreviation's sake, the *Stout House*—was one of those flash boozing-kens which are to be found in low neighbourhoods. And noted it indeed was—not on account of its beer, unless the fame thereof consisted in its execrable nature—but by reason of the characters frequenting it. The parlour was large, low, and dark; and in the evening it was invariably filled with a miscellaneous company of both sexes. Prostitutes and thieves—old procuresses and house-breakers—dissolute married women, and notorious coiners,—these were the principal supporters of the *Stout House*.

Had Machiavelli once passed an evening there, he

would not have declared as a rule that "language was given to man for the purpose of disguising his thoughts;" inasmuch as no attempt at any such disguise at all was made in that place. Every one spoke his mind in the most free and open manner possible,—calling things by their right names—and expressing the filthiest ideas in the plainest phraseology. If foul words were capable of impregnating the air, the atmosphere of the *Stout House* parlour would have engendered a pestilence.

At about half-past nine in the evening, John Jeffreys sauntered into the establishment, took a seat at the table, and gave his orders to the waiter for the beverage which he fancied at the moment.

Whenever a new-comer appears in a public room of this kind, the company invariably leave off talking for a minute or so, to enjoy a good stare at him; and they measure him from head to foot—turn him inside out, as it were—and form their rapid and silent conjectures regarding him, just as a broker "takes stock" in his mind, with a hasty survey around, on putting an execution for taxes or rates into a defaulter's house.

We cannot exactly say what opinion the company present on this occasion at the *Stout House* formed of John Jeffreys; but we are able to assure our readers that, much as he had seen of London, and well as he was acquainted with its vile dens and low places of resort, he thought to himself, as he glanced about him, that he had never before set eyes on such a dissipated-looking set of women or such a repulsive assemblage of men.

"Well, and so Mother Oliver's place is broke up at last," observed one of the females, addressing herself to another woman, and evidently taking up the thread of a conversation which the entrance of Jeffreys had for a few moments interrupted.

"Yes—and the poor old creature has been sent to quod by the beaks at Hicks's Hall, till she finds sureties for her good behaviour in future," was the reply.

"What—is that the Mother Oliver you mean, as kept the brothel in Little Sutton Street, t'other side of the Goswell Road there?" demanded a man, desisting from his occupation of smoking, for a few moments, while he asked the question.

"To be sure it is," returned the female who had previously spoken; "and a bad thing it is for me. I can tell you. I was servant there—and a good living it were. But I'll tell you how it all come about. It was a matter of six or seven weeks ago that a young feller came to the house, quite on his own accord, as you may suppose; and he stayed there three whole days, for he was quite strack, as one may say, with a fair-haired gal which had been lodging with us for some time. Well, he orders every thing of the best, promising to pay all in a lump; and so Mother Oliver gives him tick, like a fool as she was. But at last she wanted to see the colour of his money; and then he bullied, and swore, and kicked up a row, and went away without paying a mag. Well, the debt was given up as a bad job, and we thought no more about it, till we heard a few days afterwards that the house was to be indicted. So off Mother Oliver goes to the Clerk of the Peace: but, lo and behold ye! the young gentleman was a clerk in his office; and not content with regularly robbing the poor old o'man, he must try and ruin her into the bargain. Mother Oliver got to see the Clerk of the Peace, and began to tell

him all about the trick his young man had played her; but he said he knewed every thing already, that she had enticed the young feller into her house, and that was the reason she was to be indicted. So the thing come on yesterday before the Middlesex magistrates at Hicks's Hall, and Mother Oliver was sent to gaol."

"There's been a reglar rooting out of them kind of cribs all over the parish," observed one of the company; "and it's the same in a many other parishes."

"Yes: but I'll tell you what it is," exclaimed the woman who had related the above particulars; "it's only against the poor sort of houses that these prosecutions is ever got up. Lord bless you! before I went to Mother Oliver's, I was servant in a flash brothel at the West-End—a reglar slap-up place—beautifully furnished, and frequented by all the first folks. It was kept—and still is kept—by a Frenchwoman. I was there as under-housemaid for a matter of seven year; and should have been there till now, only I was too fond of taking a drop the first thing in the morning, to keep the dust out in summer and the cold out in winter."

"Ah—I des say you was always a lushing jade, Sally, observed an individual in his shirt-sleeves, and who seemed to know the woman well.

"Well, old feller—and what then?" cried she, for a moment manifesting a strong inclination to draw her finger-nails down the cheeks of her acquaintance: but, calming her anger, she said, "It do n't matter what comes from your lips—so I shan't be perwoked by you. Howsomer, as I was telling you, I was servant in the flash house at the West-End for upward of seven years; and such scenes as I saw! The old Frenchwoman used to entice the most respectable gals there by means of advertisements for governesses, ladies-maids, and so on; and they was kept prisoners till they either agreed to what she proposed, or was forced into it by the noblemen and gentlemen frequenting the place. And all this occurred, I can assure you, in one of the fashion-able streets in London. But there was never no notice taken by the parish-authorities; and as for the Society—what's its name again?—that prosecutes bad houses, it did n't seem to know there was such a brothel in existence. And I'll tell you how *that* was, too. The Frenchwoman gave such general satisfaction to her customers, and was always treating them to such novelties in the shape of gals, that she was protected by all the gay noblemen and gentlemen at the West-End. Lord bless you! some of her best customers was the Middlesex magistrates themselves; and two or three of the noblemen and gentlemen that I spoke of, was members of the Committee of that very Society which prosecutes brothels. So it was n't likely that the house would ever be interfered with. I recollect the old Frenchwoman used to laugh and joke with the great Lords and the Members of the Commons that patronised her, about the way they talked in the Parliament Houses, and the bother they made about the better observance of the Sabbath and so on. It used to be rare fun to hear the old lady, in her broken English, repeating to them some of their fine speeches, which she'd read in the newspapers; and how the gals used to laugh with them, to be sure!"

"You don't mean to say that them Lords and Members, which is always a-going on about the

Sabbath, used to frequent the brothel you speak of?" exclaimed a man.

"Do n't I, though?" cried the woman, in a tone of indignation at the bare suspicion against her veracity implied by the question: "I do indeed, my man; and I should think you ought to know the world better than to be astonished at it. It was through having the patronage of all them great people, that the old Frenchwoman never got into trouble. But none of the fine brothels at the West-End are ever prosecuted: no one would think of such a thing! It's only the low ones in the poor neighbourhoods."

"Well, I always heard say that poverty is the greatest possible crime in this country," observed the man who had recently spoken; "and now I'm convinced on it."

"I never had any doubt about it," said another. "A rich man or a rich woman may do anythink; but the poor—deuce a bit! That's quite another thing. Why, look at all these Bishops, and great Lords, and Members of the Commons, which are constantly raving about Sunday travelling: don't they go about in their carriages? and ain't Hyde Park always more filled with splendid vehicles on a Sunday than on any other day? The very Bishops which would put down coaches on a Sabbath, goes in their carriages to the Cathedrals where they preach."

"By all I can hear or learn," observed another individual present, "there's a precious sight more religious gammon in the Parliament Houses than anywheres else."

"I should think there is too," exclaimed the woman who had told the tale relative to the brothel-keepers. "Some of them noblemen and gentlemen that I spoke of was the most terrible fellows after the young women that I ever see in all my life; and they was always a bothering the Frenchwoman to send over to France, or down into the country, to entice more gals to the house. The Frenchwoman used to send out agents to entrap innocent creatures wherever she could—farmers' and clergymen's daughters, and such like. I remember what a spree we had with one of the religious Members of the Commons one night. He had been bringing in a bill, or whatever you call it, to protect young females from seduction, and had drawn such a frightful picture of the whole business, that he made all the other Members shed tears. Well, as soon as he'd done, he came straight off to our place, and asked the old Frenchwoman if she had got any thing new in the house. That very day a sweet young gal—a poor marine officer's daughter, who wanted to be a governess—had been enticed to the brothel, and the Member that I'm speaking of gave the old Frenchwoman fifty guineas for the purchase of that poor creatur'."

The woman was entering into farther details, when Wilton and another of the retainers of Jeffreys' mysterious master entered the parlour of the *Stout House*, both disguised as servants out of place. The place was too much crowded to enable them to converse at their ease: they accordingly all three repaired to a private room, Jeffreys having left at the bar a suitable message to be delivered to Old Death who was well known at that establishment.

Wilton ordered up glasses of spirits-and-water, and when the waiter had retired, after supplying the liquor, Jeffreys proceeded to acquaint his

colleagues with the promised tidings relative to Tidmarsh.

"I called at the Bunce's house in Earl Street, Seven Dials, this morning," he said, "and saw Old Death, who was quite delighted when I assured him that I had already found the two friends of whom I had spoken to him, and that that they would be here punctual this evening at half-past ten. I then told him that as the resurrection affair in St. Luke's churchyard would most likely come off to-morrow night, and as I should be engaged the best part of to-morrow on my own business, he had better let Tidmarsh go with me at once and show me the exact spot where Tom Rain was buried. The old man bit directly, and said, '*Well, Jeffreys, you're a faithful and good fellow, and can be trusted. Tidmarsh lives here now, and is up stairs at this moment.*'—So Tidmarsh was sent for; and away him and me went together to St. Luke's. In the course of conversation I found out that Tidmarsh, Bunce, and Mrs. Bunce were to go out with Old Death on some business this evening; and that while Old Death came here to meet me, the other three were to wait for him at another flash house in Mitchell Street close by."

"This is admirable!" said Wilton. "We have now the whole gang completely in our power. Fortunately, I have several of our master's people in the neighbourhood; and I will go at once and give them the necessary instructions. Wait here, Jeffreys, with Harding," he added, indicating his colleague with a look; "until I return. My absence will not be long."

Wilton left the room, Jeffreys and Harding remaining alone together.

In a quarter of an hour the Black's trusty dependant returned.

"All my arrangements are now complete," he said, resuming his seat; "and the entire gang must inevitably fall into our hands."

Jeffreys then acquainted Wilton and Harding with the exact nature of the proposal which would be made to them by Old Death; and scarcely were these preliminaries accomplished when the ancient miscreant made his appearance.

"This is business-like indeed—very business-like, my good fellow," said Old Death, taking a chair, and addressing himself to Jeffreys while he spoke. "And these, I suppose," he continued, fixing a scrutinizing glance upon the others, "are the friends you spoke of."

"Just so," replied Jeffreys. "This is Bill Jones," he added, laying his hands on Wilton's shoulder; "and there's no mistake about him. 'T'other is named Ned Thompson, and knows a thing or two, I rather suspect."

"All right—all right!" chuckled Old Death, rubbing his hands joyfully together. "I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Jones—and your's too, Mr. Thompson."

"And we're not sorry to form yours, Mr. Bones," said Wilton, affecting a manner and tone suitable to the part he was playing. "Our pal Jeffreys here has told us quite enough to make us anxious to know more of you."

"And so you shall, my dear friends," exclaimed Old Death. "I can always find business for faithful agents—and I can pay them well likewise."

"Jeffreys has told us *that*," observed Wilton.

"And I've also explained to them what you

want done to-morrow night, Mr. Bones," said Jeffreys.

"Good!" ejaculated Old Death. "Well—is it to be done?"

"There's no manner of difficulty that I can see," said Harding; "and as for any risk—why if the reward's at all decent—"

"The reward shall be liberal—very liberal," interrupted Old Death hastily. "What—what should you say to a ten-pound note a-piece?"

"Duce take it!" cried Wilton, thinking it would look better to haggle at the bargain: "remember, there's the chance of transportation—and my friend and I are not so desperate hard up—"

"No—no—I understand," observed Old Death, fearful that his meanness had disgusted his new acquaintances and that he should lose their services unless he immediately manifested a more liberal disposition: "I meant ten pounds each on account, and ten pounds more for each when the job is done. Besides," he added, "there's other business to follow on: this is only the first scene in the play that I'm going to get up, and in which you must be prominent characters."

And the aged miscreant chuckled at his attempt at humour.

"What you have now said," observed Wilton, "quite alters the case. Twenty pounds each, and the chance of more work, is a proposal that we can accept. What say you, Thompson?"

"I say what you say, Jones," replied Harding.

"Now then we understand each other, my friends," continued Old Death; "and I will at once give you the earnest-money."

Thus speaking, he drew forth a greasy purse, and presented the two men each with ten sovereigns, which they appeared to snatch up with much avidity.

"I have now nothing more to say to you," resumed Benjamin Bones, his fierce eyes sparkling beneath his overhanging brows with the hope of speedy vengeance on the Earl of Ellingham. "You must place yourselves at the disposal of your friend Jeffreys here, who will inform you how to act and show you precisely in what way my wishes are to be executed. I must now leave you: but to-morrow evening," he added, in a tone of savage meaning, "I shall see you in Earl Street with the coffin!"

"You may rely upon us, Mr. Bones," replied Wilton.

"But won't you stay and take a glass with us?" demanded Jeffreys.

"Not to night—not to night," was the answer.

"I took something short at the bar as I passed by; but to-morrow night, my friends—to-morrow night," he exclaimed emphatically, "you shall find a good supper ready for you in Earl Street when you come, and a drop of the right sort."

"So much the better," said Jeffreys: "I like a good supper. But what's your hurry at present, Mr. Bones?"

"To tell you the truth, my dear boy," answered the old man, "I have got three friends waiting for me at a ken in Mitchell Street; and I promised not to keep them longer than I could help. So you must excuse me on this occasion; and, therefore, good bye."

Old Death shook hands with the three men, and took his departure—chuckling to himself at the idea of having secured the services of Jeffreys' friends at so cheap a rate, inasmuch as he would cheerfully



have given them, griping and avaricious as he was, three or four times the sum stipulated in order to secure their services in the scheme of carrying out his atrocious plans of vengeance.

But for once, Old Death! the laugh was against yourself—as you speedily discovered to your cost!

We must not however anticipate.

The moment the old man had left the room, Wilton, Harding, and Jeffreys exchanged glances of satisfaction and triumph.

“Bunce, Tidmarsh, and Bunce’s wife are all three at the flash house in Mitchell Street—that is quite clear,” said Jeffreys.

“Yes,” observed Wilton: “and the moment for action is now at hand. Let us depart.”

The three men accordingly left the tavern, and hastened in the direction which they knew Old Death must pursue in order to reach Mitchell Street.

As they passed by another public-house in Helmet Row, Wilton bade them pause for a moment, while he went in to give the necessary instructions to the persons who were associated with him in the expedition of this night, and whom he had ordered to remain there until his return. He speedily rejoined

Jeffreys and Harding; and all three were once more on the track of Old Death.

At the same time, half-a-dozen men, dressed as labourers, issued from the public-house at which Wilton had called; and, dispersing themselves, hurried singly by different ways towards the road separating the two burial-grounds.

Precisely at the corner where Mitchell Street joins Helmet Row, and just as he was in the act of turning into the former thoroughfare, Old Death was suddenly seized by three men, and gagged before he had time to utter a single exclamation. The moon shone brightly; and his eyes flashed the fires of savage rage and wild amazement, as their glances fell upon the countenances of Wilton, Harding, and Jeffreys. He stamped his feet in a paroxysm of fury, and then struggled desperately to release himself: but his efforts were altogether unavailing—though he exerted a strength which could scarcely have been expected on the part of so old and feeble a man. He was borne off to the Black’s carriage, which was waiting close by; and, being thrust in, was immediately bound and blindfolded by two persons who were already seated inside the vehicle, which drove away at a rapid rate.

This important feat being accomplished, Wilton desired Jeffreys to proceed to the flash-house in Mitchell Street, and induce Tidmarsh and the Buncees to accompany him into the ambush prepared for them.

Jeffreys accordingly repaired to the boozing-ken alluded to, where he found the objects of his search seated at a table, and occupied in the discussion of bread and cheese and porter.

"Sorry to interrupt you, my friends," said Jeffreys; "but you must come away with me directly. Mr. Bones has sent me to fetch you—"

"Is anything the matter?" asked Mrs. Bunce, in a low but agitated voice, as she glanced towards the strangers present in the room.

"I can't say what's the matter," replied Jeffreys, "because I don't know. But Mr. Bones seems much excited—and he's walking up and down the road between the burying-grounds. He told me to desire you to come to him directly."

"Is he alone there?" inquired Toby Bunce, looking particularly frightened.

"Yes—quite alone. There's no danger of any thing, if that's what you mean: but I think Mr. Bones has met with some annoyance. Come on!"

Tidmarsh and the Buncees accordingly rose, paid for what they had ordered, but which they had not time to finish, and repaired with Jeffreys to the place mentioned by him.

"Where is Mr. Bones?" demanded Mrs. Bunce, in her querulous voice.

But ere Jeffreys had time to give any answer, his three companions were set upon and made prisoners by the Black's retainers.

It is only necessary to state, in a few words, that they were gagged, blindfolded, thrust into a second vehicle which was in attendance, and conveyed to the same place whither Tim the Snammer, Josh Pedler, and Old Death had preceded them.

Wilton, having superintended this last transaction, remained behind along with Jeffreys, to whom he addressed himself in the following manner, as soon as the carriage had departed:—

"I am commissioned by my master, who is also your's, to state to you his entire approval of your conduct. Measures have been taken to save Mr. Torrens, in a manner which cannot implicate you. Keep your own counsel: be prudent and steady—and you may not only atone for past errors, but become a respected and worthy member of society. For a few days it will be necessary for you to remain as quiet as possible at your own lodgings; and whatever extraordinary reports you may hear concerning the affairs of Mr. Torrens—however wonderful the means adopted to proclaim his innocence of the crime of murder may be—keep a still tongue in your head! So much depends upon your implicit secrecy, that you would not be now left at large, did not our master entertain a high opinion of your fidelity. But beware how you act! You have had ample proofs not only of his power, but likewise of his matchless boldness and unflinching determination in working out his aims."

"For my own sake, Mr. Wilton," said Jeffreys, "I shall follow all your advice."

"And you will live to bless the hour when you first encountered our master," was the answer. "It is not probable that your services will be required again for some days: but should it be otherwise, a letter or a messenger will be dispatched to you."

abode. Our master retains in his hands the money that you left with him; and the next time he has occasion to see you, he will advise you in what manner to lay it out to your best advantage. In the meantime he has sent you a moderate sum—not from your own funds, but from his purse—for your present wants; and so long as you remain in his service, your wages will be liberal, but paid in comparatively small and frequent sums, so that the possession of a large amount may not lead you into follies. By this course he will train your mind to recognise the true value of money honourably obtained, and fit you for the position in which the funds he holds of your's may shortly place you."

Jeffreys and Wilton then separated, the former more astonished than ever at the bold and yet skillfully executed proceedings set on foot by his mysterious master.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CLARENCE VILLIERS AND HIS AUNT.

THE church of Saint Sepulchre on Snow Hill, was proclaiming the hour of nine on the following morning, when Clarence Villiers again entered the office of the governor of Newgate, and solicited permission to see Mrs. Torrens, representing the degree of relationship in which he stood with regard to that unhappy woman.

We have before stated that Mrs. Torrens had been placed in a ward where there were several other prisoners of her own sex; and the governor, animated by a proper feeling of delicacy, and supposing that the interview of relatives under such circumstances was likely to be of a nature which it would be cruel to submit to the gaze of curious strangers, immediately conducted Clarence into his own parlour, whither the guilty aunt was speedily conducted.

When they were alone together, Clarence endeavoured to find utterance for a few kind words, but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth—and he burst into tears.

Mrs. Torrens threw herself into a chair, covered her face with her hands, and expressed the anguish of her soul in deep and convulsing moans.

"Oh! my dear aunt," exclaimed Clarence at length; "in what a frightful position do I find you! What terrible changes have a few short days effected!"

"Do not reproach me, Clarence—Oh! do not reproach me," said the wretched woman, extending her arms in an imploring manner towards him: "I am miserable enough as it is!"

"My God! I can well believe you," cried Villiers, speaking in a tone of profound commiseration, and forgetting for a moment the iniquity of which his aunt had been guilty: for she was frightfully altered—her plumpness was gone—her cheeks were thin and pale—and she even stooped, as if with premature old age.

"Oh! yes—I am indeed very, very miserable," she repeated, in a tone of intense bitterness, and clasping her hands together in the excess of her mental agony. "Such nights as I have passed since I first set foot in this dreadful place! No human tongue can tell the amount of wretchedness which I endure. In the day-time 'tis too horrible—oh! far too horrible to think of: but at night—when all

is dark and silent, and when my very thoughts—my very ideas seem to spring into life and assume ghastly shapes——”

“Oh! my dear aunt, do not allow your imagination thus to obtain dominion over you!” interrupted Clarence. “Endeavour to compose yourself a little—if only a little—for it does me harm to see you thus! Besides, I have so much to say to you—so many questions to ask you—so much advice to give you——”

“Alas! the only counsel you can give me, Clarence,” said the wretched woman, shaking with a cold shudder, though the perspiration stood in big drops upon her brow,—“the only counsel you can give me, Clarence, is to bid me prepare for another world.”

“Is it possible?” cried Villiers, shocked by the appalling significance of these words: “have you no hope—no chance——”

“Would you believe me were I to assure you that I am not guilty of the crime imputed to me—the forgery of a draft upon the bankers of the late Sir Henry Courtenay?” demanded Mrs. Torrens, fixing her sunken, lustreless eyes upon her nephew. “No—no: you are convinced that I *am* guilty—and a jury will pronounce me to be so! Think not that I blind myself against all the horrors of my position! I know my fate—I know that I must die eventually by the hand of the executioner——”

“God have mercy upon you!” exclaimed Villiers, pressing his hand to his brow as if to calm the dreadful thoughts which his aunt’s language excited in his brain.

“Yes, Clarence—that must be my fate,” she continued: “unless I obtain a short respite—of a few months—by confessing——”

“Confessing what?” cried Clarence impatiently.

“Oh! no—not to you can I make that avowal!” she exclaimed, in a shrieking tone.

“But I understand you! Yes—a light breaks in upon me—and——”

“Do not spurn me altogether, Clarence!” said the wretched woman, throwing herself upon her knees before him, and grasping one of his hands with convulsive tightness in both her own. “Oh! I know what you would reproach me with! If not for my own sake—yet for that of the unborn child which I bear in my bosom, I should have avoided this awful risk—recoiled from that fatal crime! But I was so confident of success—so certain of avoiding exposure,—and my affairs, too, were so desperate—without resources—Sir Henry Courtenay having disappeared in such a mysterious manner——”

“Aunt,” interrupted Clarence, in a firm and solemn tone, as he raised her from her suppliant posture, and placed her in a chair,—“answer me as if you were questioned by your God! Are your hands unstained with the blood——”

“Holy heavens! would you believe me capable of murder?” cried Mrs. Torrens, in a penetrating, thrilling tone of deep anguish. “Listen, Clarence,” she continued, her voice suddenly becoming low and hollow, as she rose also from her seat and laid her emaciated hand upon his arm,—“listen, Clarence, for a few moments. I have been of all hypocrites the most vile—I have led a dissolute life, the profligacy of which has been concealed beneath the mask of religion—I have subsisted upon the wages paid to me by a paramour for the use of my person—I have forged—I have become the accomplice of the ra-

visher of innocence,—but a murderess—no—never—never!”

“God be thanked for that assurance, which I now sincerely believe!” exclaimed Clarence. “But you speak of being the accomplice of the ravisher of innocence? Is it possible—answer me quickly—that Rosamond—my sister-in-law——”

“Oh! kill me—kill me, Clarence!” cried the miserable woman, again throwing herself at his feet in the anguish of her soul: “kill me, I say—for that was the blackest crime which one woman ever perpetrated towards another!”

“Then all my worst fears are confirmed!” groaned Clarence; and, turning abruptly away from her in sudden loathing and horror, he broke forth into violent ejaculations of rage.

But in less than a minute the sounds of grief, more bitter than his fury was terrible, forced themselves on his ears; and glancing round, he beheld his aunt lying prostrate on the floor, her face buried in the carpet, and her whole frame convulsed with an anguish which in a moment renewed all the feelings of commiseration in his really generous heart.

Springing towards the spot where she had fallen when he burst so rudely away from her, he raised the wretched creature in his arms, conveyed her once more to a seat, and endeavoured to address her in terms of consolation and kindness. He even implored her pardon for what he termed his brutality towards her.

“Oh! you have no forgiveness to ask of me, Clarence,” she murmured, in a faint and half-suffocating tone. “Your indignation is most natural—and I am the vilest being in female shape that ever cursed the earth with a baleful presence, or brought dishonour on a glorious sex! My God! when I look back and survey all my crimes—all my misdeeds, I despair of pardon in another world!”

“And now you add another wickedness to those of which you spoke,” exclaimed Clarence: “for the mercy of God is infinite! It must be so—it would be an awful sin, a monstrous impiety to believe otherwise! A great and good Being, possessing omnipotent power and a will which there is none to question, can have no pleasure in casting your soul—poor, frail, crushed-down woman!—into a lake of eternal fires! Oh! believe me—there is hope even for greater criminals than yourself! But every atonement which it is possible for you to make upon earth, *must* be made; and, whatever be your fate amongst beings who forgive nothing, you will experience the blessings of salvation at the hands of a Being who forgives every thing!”

“I am penitent—oh! believe me, Clarence, I am very penitent!” exclaimed his aunt. “Would to God that I could live the last twenty years of my life over again! Not an error—no, not even a frailty should stain my soul! But these thoughts come upon us when it is too late to take them as the guides of our conduct.”

“Alas! such is indeed the case!” said Clarence, mournfully. “And now, aunt, I am about to ask you to perform a duty which will perhaps lacerate your bosom—revive a thousand bitter reflections——”

“I understand you, Clarence,” interrupted Mrs. Torrens, subduing her emotions as much as possible, and speaking in a comparatively tranquil tone: “you require from my lips a true and faithful narrative of all that has occurred since you left London with your beautiful bride? Well—that narrative

shall be given. Sit down by me—and listen : but, in so listening, you will only receive fresh proofs my black turpitude ! For systematically and coolly—not in the excitement of moments when evil passions were more powerful than reason—have I perpetrated those crimes which now weigh so heavily upon my soul !”

Clarence took a chair by his aunt's side, and prepared to hear her story with an earnest but mournful attention.

His aunt then related to him the particulars of the dreadful conspiracy which had been devised by herself, the late Sir Henry Courtenay, and Mr. Torrens against the honour of Rosamond ; and Clarence now learnt for the first time that Mr. Torrens had only consented to his marriage with Adelaïs in order to get them both out of the way, so that the younger sister might be completely in the power of those who had thus leagued against her happiness and her virtue.

“Although I deplore that such motives should have been the favouring circumstances which led to my union with Adelaïs,” said Clarence, “yet I rejoice that my charming and adored wife is safely removed by the fact of that marriage from the power of such a monster of a parent.”

Mrs. Torrens sighed profoundly, and then entered upon those details which explained to her nephew how she became acquainted with Mr. Torrens—the whole particulars of the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay, as she herself had heard them from the lips of Mr. Torrens—the forgery of the cheque, to which crime that individual was privy—the way in which she had compelled him to marry her—and the flight of Howard, the attorney, with the produce of the crime for which she was now in a felon's gaol.

“And you believe that Mr. Torrens is really innocent of the black deed imputed to him ?” said Clarence, inquiringly—for he was now anxious to ascertain whether the tale which he had just heard in explanation of that mysterious event, would correspond with the proclamation of Mr. Torrens' innocence which was to be that day made to the world, according to the assurances given on the preceding morning by Esther de Medina.

“I am confident that the account given by Mr. Torrens, and which I have now related to you, is correct,” answered Mrs. Torrens : “for,” she added, after a few moments' hesitation, “when once we understood each other—when once our hands were united—there was no necessity to maintain any secrets from each other. We plunged headlong into crime, hand-in-hand—and felt no shame in each other's presence. Besides, he had no motive to perpetrate such a deed : on the contrary, he deprived himself of a friend whose purse was most useful to him.”

“True !” observed Clarence, struck by the truth of this reasoning.

“In respect to myself,” resumed the unhappy woman, “I have made up my mind how to act. I shall not aggravate my enmity by denial : I shall plead guilty to the charge of forgery—and without implicating that wretched man on whom the charge of murder now presses with such a fearful weight of circumstantial evidence. No—I shall not mention him in connexion with that deed of mine ; so that I may escape from the cruel difficulty in which he is

now placed, no other accusations, beyond those of his own conscience, may injure his peace.”

“You have determined to adopt the course which I should have counselled,” said Clarence. “It would be useless to attempt the defence of that which is so clearly apparent. The forged signature had not the baronet's private mark attached to it ; but the clerk who cashed it for you, did not think of scrutinising it so closely at the moment, as you were well known to him. A subsequent examination of it proved the forgery. Stands not the case so ? At least, it was thus reported in the newspapers.”

“The statement is correct,” answered Mrs. Torrens, mournfully ; “and I feel convinced that I shall possess a greater chance of obtaining the royal mercy, by pleading guilty at once and confessing my error. Oh ! to escape death—a premature death—a horrible death !” she cried, suddenly becoming nervously excited again.

“Compose yourself, aunt—compose yourself !” exclaimed Clarence ; “for you have an act of justice to do towards an innocent man. In a word, I wish you to sign the account of the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay, as you received it from the lips of Mr. Torrens, and as you have now related it to me. I will draw it up briefly ; and no one can tell of what benefit the existence of such a document may prove to your unhappy husband.”

Clarence hastened to procure writing materials from the governor's office ; and, on his return to the parlour, he drew up the statement, combining it with a confession of the forgery, though not mentioning the name of Mr. Torrens in connexion with that latter crime. The penitent woman then signed the paper in a firm handwriting ; and it immediately appeared as if a load were taken from her mind.

Villiers now informed her that Rosamond had found an asylum with some kind friends of the Jewish persuasion ; but, faithful to his promise to Esther de Medina, he did not drop even so much as a hint of the hopes which that admirable young lady had held out with regard to the expected proclamation and existing proofs of Mr. Torrens' innocence. It struck him, however, that the paper which he had that moment received from his aunt might assist the steps that were in such mysterious progress elsewhere to remove from the head of his father-in-law the dreadful charge which rested upon it.

“I must now leave you, aunt,” said the young man, rising from his seat.

“Shall you visit Mr. Torrens ?” she inquired, in a hesitating manner.

“Not to-day,” was the answer. “The prison regulations do not permit visitors to call on the same inmate of this gaol two days consecutively. In fact—for I abhor every thing savouring of duplicity—I will candidly inform you that Adelaïs, myself, Rosamond, and the young lady with whom that poor girl is staying, saw Mr. Torrens yesterday.”

“You visited him first !” murmured the wretched woman. “But I do not blame you—I cannot reproach you, Clarence,” she added hastily. “It was natural that your wife should wish to see her father—and equally natural that you should accompany her. Besides, I know that it must have cost you a painful effort, to enter the presence of one so stained with crime—so polluted—so infamous as I !”

“Your contrition has obliterated from my mind

all feelings save those of regret and commiseration," returned Clarence warmly. "Would that justice could so easily forget the past as I!"

"Oh! I thank you for those generous assurances," exclaimed Mrs. Torrens, bursting into tears; "for sympathy in such a place as this is dearer to the soul than all the enjoyments which the great world outside could possibly bestow! The kind word—aye, and what is more, the word of forgiveness—is the holy dew of heaven. For years and years, Clarence, was I a vile hypocrite, and such sentences as those flowed glibly from my tongue—because they were the means whereby I deceived the world. But now—oh! now, I feel all I say; and whatever may be my doom, I shall at last appreciate the sublime truths of that religion which I so long used as a mask. Clarence," she added, in a more measured tone, "always suspect the individual who makes a display of his religion. Be assured that true religious feelings do not obtrude themselves in all unseasonable moments upon society. The man or the woman who enacts the part of a *saint*, is nothing more nor less than a despicable hypocrite; and I believe that more profligacy is concealed beneath such a mask as I so long wore, than can possibly exist amongst those who make no outward display of religion. But I will not detain you longer: I know that Adela's must be cruelly shocked by all that has lately happened. One word, however, before we part:—you will not—you can not acquaint *her* with—with—"

"With the ruin of Rosamond!" cried Clarence, seeing that his aunt hesitated. "Oh! no—no: it would kill my poor wife! Not for worlds would I allow her to learn that dreadful secret! And now I understand full well wherefore Rosamond preferred to remain with her new friends, rather than accompany her sister and myself."

Mrs. Torrens and Clarence embraced and separated; the former returning to her ward in company with the matron, who had waited in an adjacent room during this interview;—and the latter repairing to the office of the governor, to whom he handed the document which his aunt had signed.

The young man then proceeded to the house of some friends dwelling in the City, and with whom he had left Adela's during his visit to Newgate.

We should observe that he was fully enabled thus to dispose of his time according to his own will, he having obtained six weeks' leave of absence from the Government Office to which he belonged.

In the course of the morning, he called at the lodgings which he had occupied in Bridge Street, Blackfriars, previously to his marriage with Adela's, to see if there were any letters lying there for him. There was only one; and the contents of that ran as follow:—

"Pull Mall West"

"The Earl of Ellingham presents his compliments to Mr. Villiers, and requests that Mr. Villiers will, on his return to town, favour the Earl with an interview relative to private business of some importance."

"There must assuredly be some mistake in this," observed Clarence, as he showed the letter to Adela's, "for I am totally unacquainted with this nobleman, and cannot understand what private business he can possibly have to transact with me. However, I will call to-morrow or next day and ascertain the point, when the excitement connected with your father's situation shall have somewhat subsided by the declaration of his innocence."

We need hardly say that Clarence had communicated to his beloved wife the fact that his aunt had narrated to him the particulars of the manner in which Sir Henry Courtenay came by his death, and that he had drawn up the narrative, which, upon being signed by her, had been deposited in the hands of the governor of Newgate.

CHAPTER XCV.

SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT A HERO.

IT was about mid-day when an extraordinary rumour began to spread like wildfire throughout the metropolis.

The report was, that between ten and eleven o'clock that morning, Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles had presented themselves to the sitting magistrate at Bow Street, and had not only communicated to that functionary a surprising account of certain adventures which had happened to themselves, but had likewise placed in his hands a document which proclaimed the innocence of Mr. Torrens, who was lying in Newgate under an accusation of murder.

The adventures alluded to were of such an amazing character, that, had they been related by persons of a less honourable reputation than Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles, they would have been treated as a pure invention on the part either of maniacs or unprincipled friends of the accused.

But the known integrity of those two gentlemen gave no scope for even the slightest breath of suspicion; and their tale, though wonderful, was so consistent in all its parts, that it was received as one of those truths which are "stranger than fiction."

The entire metropolis was in amazement!

Two respectable gentlemen—an eminent physician and a wealthy Justice of the Peace—had been conducted, blindfolded, to a house where they had received the depositions of two men who confessed themselves to be the murderers of the late Sir Henry Courtenay. There was no appearance of fraud in that confession. The men had been cross-examined apart, and had agreed in the minutest details. Every one therefore believed that Mr. Torrens was indeed innocent; and the sitting magistrate at Bow Street expressed the same opinion.

But who was the individual that had caused Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles to be thus made the recipients of the confession of the murderers? Where was the house to which those gentlemen had been taken? What motive was there for screening the assassins? Why was so much mystery observed in the entire transaction? And wherefore had Sir Christopher and the physician been enjoined to withhold the publication of the matter for twenty-four hours after its occurrence?

These questions were in every body's mouth; but no one could suggest any thing resembling even the shadow of a satisfactory solution.

The weapon with which the crime had been perpetrated, and a portion of the proceeds of the robbery effected at Torrens Cottage at the same time, accompanied the depositions placed by Sir Christopher Blunt in the hands of the magistrate; and a

surgeon, on examining the corpse which had been removed to the deceased's house previous to receiving the rites of Christian burial, declared that the throat must have been cut by such an instrument as the one thus produced.

But this was not all. The moment the rumour of what had occurred at Bow Street reached the prison of Newgate, the governor hastened to the police-office, and submitted to the magistrate the confession made that morning by Mrs. Torrens.

This confession not only admitted her guilt in respect to the forgery—but gave such a version of the murder, as completely tallied with the depositions made by Timothy Splint and Joshua Pedler.

Looking at the entire case, as it thus stood, there was no doubt of the innocence of Mr. Torrens; and all that gentleman's friends—who, by the bye, had hitherto kept aloof from him—crowded to Newgate to congratulate him on the facts which had transpired.

The sensation created by the affair, throughout the capital, was tremendous; and when the evening papers were published, the copies were greedily caught up in all directions. It was a fine harvest for those journals; and their sale that day was prodigious.

An individual often spoken of, but never yet seen—namely, “the oldest inhabitant in the metropolis”—was duly mentioned on the occasion.

“Never,” said each of the evening papers—as if the reporters had all been suddenly struck by the same idea,—“never, within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of the metropolis, has so extraordinary a case transpired.”

And certainly no event for many years had produced such a powerful excitement, animating even the most callous and indifferent dispositions with a desire to know more, and setting a-thinking many who had quite enough in their own affairs to occupy all their thoughts.

The taverns, public-houses, and coffee-shops became the scenes of loud and interesting discussions, but even the knowing-ones found no opportunity of displaying their sagacity, for the mystery of the whole affair positively defied conjecture.

“But who can the man be that is at the bottom of all this? and where can his residence be situated?” were the questions which every tongue uttered, and to which no one could reply.

That such an extraordinary incident could occur in the metropolis, without leaving the faintest trace or the smallest clue to the elucidation of the enigma, appeared almost incredible.

As for Sir Christopher Blunt—he certainly did not appear to know whether he stood upon his head or his heels. The Home Secretary sent for him in the course of the afternoon, and received from his lips a full and complete statement of the whole occurrence; for the Government was naturally indignant that any individual should unwarrantably usurp the functions of the proper authorities by holding murderers in his own custody and adopting his own course to prove the innocence of a man in the grasp of justice. Sir Christopher was, however, unable to afford the slightest information which was likely to lead to the discovery of that individual, or of his place of abode.

On his return to his own house in Jermyn Street, Sir Christopher found several noblemen and influential gentlemen, including three or four Members

of Parliament, waiting to see him; and he instantly became the lion of the company.

No pen can describe the immense pomposity with which he repeated his narrative of the mysterious transaction: no words can convey an idea of the immeasurable conceit and self-sufficiency with which he described the cross-examination of the murderers.

In fact, the knight made himself so busy in the matter—was so accessible to all visitors who were anxious to gratify their curiosity by asking a thousand questions—and was so ready to afford the newspaper-reporters all the information which he had to impart respecting the incident, that no one thought of applying to Dr. Lascelles in a similar manner. This circumstance was the more agreeable to the physician, inasmuch as he not only disliked wasting his time in gossip, but was well pleased at escaping the necessity of giving vague answers or positive denials in an affair the details of which were in reality no mystery to him.

To all his visitors Sir Christopher Blunt took care to speak in the following terms:—“You see, the individual who is the prime mover in this most extraordinary proceeding, required the assistance of no ordinary magistrate. He wanted a man of keen penetration—the most perfect business-habits—and of the highest character,—a man, in a word, who would probe the very souls of the two miscreants to be placed before him, and on whose report the world could implicitly rely. That was the reason wherefore I was pitched upon as the Justice of the Peace best qualified to undertake so difficult a business.”

Sir Christopher became a perfect hero, as the mysterious stranger had predicted; and during the remainder of that memorable day on which the innocence of Mr. Torrens was proclaimed, Jermyn Street was literally lined with carriages, the common destination being the knight's abode;—so that a stranger in the metropolis would have supposed that such a scene of animation and excitement could only be occasioned by the arrival of some great foreign prince, or that the Prime Minister lived in that house and was holding a levée.

When all Sir Christopher's visitors had retired, and he found himself alone in his drawing-room at about half-past ten that evening, he threw himself on a sofa, exclaiming aloud, “Egad! that old fellow, who knocked down the Irish Captain and afterwards turned out to be a young man, was quite right. I am a hero—a regular hero! This popularity is truly delightful. I really do not envy the Duke of Wellington his having won the battle of Waterloo. No, indeed—not I! Sir Christopher Blunt is a greater man than his Grace, although only a knight.”

Scarcely had the worthy gentleman arrived at this very satisfactory conclusion, when Mr. Lykspittal entered the room, holding his portfolio in his hand, and bowing so low at every third step which he took in advancing towards the knight, that it really seemed as if he were anxious to ascertain how close to the floor he could put his nose without rolling completely over like the clown at Astley's.

“My revered patron,” began Mr. Lykspittal, “I have taken the liberty of bringing the first half dozen pages of the manuscript of the pamphlet—”

“The deuce take the pamphlet, Mr. Lykspittal!” shouted Sir Christopher, leaping from the sofa, and, in the exuberance of his joy, kicking the portfolio from the literary gentleman's hands up to the ceiling.

ing, so that the papers all showered down upon the head of their author, who stood amazed and aghast at this singular reception.

But in the next moment it struck the discomfited Mr. Lykspittal that Sir Christopher Blunt had suddenly taken leave of his senses—or, in other words, had gone raving mad; and he rushed to the door.

"Stop—stop!" cried Sir Christopher, darting after him. "What the deuce is the matter with the man?"

"No—do n't—do n't injure me!" roared Mr. Lykspittal, falling upon his knees, as the knight caught him by the arm.

"Injure you, my good fellow!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, surveying him with the utmost amazement. "What could possibly put such a thing into your head? I am not angry with you: I'm only mad—"

"I know you are!" cried Mr. Lykspittal in a tone of horror, while his countenance expressed the most ludicrous alarm.

"Yes—mad—literally mad—insane—my dear fellow!" vociferated Sir Christopher, quitting his hold upon the literary gentleman and absolutely dancing round him.

"O Lord! O Lord!" groaned Mr. Lykspittal, still upon his knees and nailed by terror to the spot.

"Insane—mad with joy!" cried the knight. "But get up—and don't be frightened. I am not angry with you. But I suppose that the idea of entering the presence of a man like me is too much for you, my poor fellow," added Sir Christopher, stopping short in the midst of his capering antics, and surveying the literary gentleman with immense commiseration.

"Oh! only mad—with joy?" murmured Mr. Lykspittal, considerably relieved by the assurance, and starting to his feet: then, dexterously catching at the suspicion which Sir Christopher, in his boundless self-conceit, had expressed, the literary gentleman suddenly resumed his usual cringing manner, and said in a tone of deep veneration, "Pardon me, my excellent patron, if—for a moment overcome by your presence—the presence of a man whose name is upon every tongue—"

"Say no more about it, my good fellow!" cried the knight, with all the bland condescension of a patron. "To tell you the truth, I am quite beside myself with joy; but I should not expose myself thus to any one save yourself. You are, however, a privileged person—behind the scenes, as it were, and you know how necessary popularity is to me. Egad! Mr. Lykspittal, I little thought when I began life as a poor boy, that I should one day become a great—"

"A very great," meekly suggested the sycophant.

"A very great man," added Sir Christopher, emphatically, as he surveyed himself in a neighbouring mirror. "I tell you what, Mr. Lykspittal—those vulgar citizens of Portsoken must now be ready to cut their throats—"

"A person *did* expire in that ward very suddenly to-day, Sir Christopher," observed the literary gentleman, drawing upon his imagination for this little incident, which he knew would prove most welcome to the knight's vanity; "and there's every reason to suppose that his death was caused by vexation."

"No doubt of it!" exclaimed the Justice of the Peace, playing with his shirt-frill. "Do n't you see

that there will be now no necessity for the pamphlets?"

Here Mr. Lykspittal's countenance fell.

"But you shall write instead," continued the knight, "a complete narrative of my most romantic and extraordinary adventures."

Here Mr. Lykspittal's countenance brightened up again.

"No—you shan't, though," cried his patron, an idea striking him.

Again the sycophant's brow became overcast.

"You shall write the history of my life!" added Sir Christopher.

And again the literary gentleman's brow expanded.

"Yes—*The Life*—"

"And *Times*," suggested Mr. Lykspittal.

"*The Life and Times of Sir Christopher Blunt*," exclaimed the knight triumphantly.

"In three volumes, large octavo, with portraits," added the sycophant.

"Egad! that's a capital suggestion of your's—the portraits, I mean," said Sir Christopher. "But you must show that, although I began the world with nothing, yet I am of an ancient and highly respectable family—"

"Certainly, my dear sir. There was no doubt a Blunt at Crecy or Agincourt," observed Mr. Lykspittal. "At all events it is easy to say there was, and in a note put '*See M.S.S., British Museum*.' That is the way we always manage in such cases, my dear Sir Christopher. The British Museum is a most convenient place—"

"What—to write in?" asked the Justice of the Peace.

"No, sir—to furnish pedigrees for those who have n't got any."

"Ah! I understand!" cried Sir Christopher, chuckling. "Capital! capital! Well, my good fellow, set about the *Life and Times* directly. But, by the bye, I wish the work to begin something in this way—'*It was on a dark and tempestiferous night—the wind roared—the artillery flew in fitting gusts—the streaming shafts of electricity shot across the eccentric sky*,'—and so on. That's a pretty sentence, you perceive; and being entirely my own composition—striking me, in fact, at the moment—and not suggested by any other person—"

"It does you infinite credit, Sir Christopher," interrupted Mr. Lykspittal, with an obsequious bow; "and with a *little* correction—"

"Oh! of course you will use your discretion. Well, now we understand each other, Mr. Lykspittal; and you will begin the work immediately. Of course you must introduce a great quantity of correspondence between myself and the leading men of this age, but who are now all dead."

"Have you any such letters by you, sir?" enquired the literary gentleman.

"Not I!" ejaculated Sir Christopher Blunt, speaking bluntly indeed.

"Oh! that's no matter—I can easily invent some," observed Mr. Lykspittal. "I thank you most sincerely for your kind—your generous patronage, my dear Sir Christopher. In fact, I can never forget it—I—I—"

And Mr. Lykspittal, by way of working his sycophancy up to the highest possible pitch—or, shall we not say, down to the lowest degree of self-abase-

ment—affected to burst into tears and rushed from the room.

"Poor fellow! he's quite overcome by his feelings," murmured Sir Christopher to himself, "That's what I call real gratitude, now!"

And, having mused upon this and divers other matters for some few minutes, the worthy knight went up stairs to see his affectionate spouse and the baby, ere he retired to his own apartment.

CHAPTER XCVI.

CARLTON HOUSE.

WE are now about to relate an incident which, at present, may appear to have little to do with the thread of our narrative, but which, we can assure our readers, will hereafter prove of immense importance in the development of the tale.

On the evening of that day when the innocence of Mr. Torrens was proclaimed, as related in the preceding chapter, King George IV. gave a grand entertainment at Carlton House.

This splendid mansion was that monarch's favourite residence—not only when he was Prince of Wales and Regent, but likewise while he wore on his unworthy brow the British diadem.

Execrable as the character of this unprincipled voluptuary and disgusting debauchee notoriously was, he unquestionably possessed good taste in choosing the decorations of a drawing-room; selecting a paper of a suitable pattern to match particular furniture, and superintending the fittings of a banquetting-hall. Carlton House was accordingly rendered a perfect gem of a palace under his auspices; and there the King loved to dwell, passing his evenings in elegant orgies and his nights in lascivious enjoyment.

The interior of Carlton House was indeed most sumptuous in all its arrangements. The state-apartments were fitted up with a grandeur properly chastened by elegance; and convenience and comfort were studied as much as magnificence. The entrance-hall was paved with veined marble the roof being supported by Ionic columns from the quarries of Skenna. The west ante-room contained many fine portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds. But the most splendid of all the apartments was the Crimson Drawing-room, which was decorated in the richest and yet most tasteful manner. The rich draperies, the architectural embellishments, the immense pier-glasses, the chandeliers of cut glass, and the massive furniture all richly gilt, evinced the state of perfection which the arts and manufactures have attained in this country.

Adjoining the Crimson Drawing-room was the Rotunda, the architecture of which was of the Ionic order, every part having been selected from the finest specimens of ancient Greece. The ceiling was painted to represent the sky, and was in the shape of a hemisphere. Another beautiful apartment was the Rose Satin Drawing-room, fitted up after the Chinese fashion, and in the middle of which stood a circular table of Sevres porcelain, the gift of Louis XVIII. to the King. Many pictures by the old masters likewise embellished that room.

We must also mention the Blue Velvet Room, remarkable for the refined taste displayed in its

decorations,—and the Library, Golden Drawing-room, Gothic Dining-room, Bow Room, Conservatory, Armoury, Vestibule, and Throne Room, the last of which was fitted up with crimson velvet, and produced, when illuminated, a superb effect.

This rapid glance at the interior of Carlton House may serve to afford the reader a general idea of the splendour of that palace,—a splendour almost dazzling to contemplate, if we consider it for a few moments in juxtaposition with the deplorable misery of thousands and thousands of cottages, huts, and hovels in which so large a number of the working population are forced to dwell!

But kings and queens care nothing for the condition of their people. So long as their selfish desires can be gratified and all their childish whims or extravagant caprices can be fulfilled, the industrious millions may rot in their miserable hovels, crushed by the weight of that taxation which is so largely augmented by the wants of Royalty!

It is absurd to venerate and adore Royalty; for Royalty is either despicably frivolous, or vilely arbitrary—and he who admires or adores it, is an enemy to his own interests.

Let us, however, return to the subject of this chapter.

It was ten at night; and carriage after carriage, in rapid succession, set down the noble and beauteous guests at the entrance of Carlton House.

The palace itself was a blaze of light; and the brilliant lustre, shed throughout the spacious rooms by the magnificent chandeliers, was reflected on the numerous pier-glasses and enhanced by the splendour of the diamonds worn by the ladies.

Upwards of four hundred guests—constituting the *élite* of the fashionable world—were there assembled; and amongst them moved the King himself—undoubtedly a polished gentleman, although the few—the very few qualifications which he did possess have been greatly exaggerated by writers of the Lykspittal school.

It was a *re-union* of beauty, rank, and fashion, of the most brilliant description, though on a limited scale. A full band was in attendance; and dancing commenced in the drawing-rooms shortly after ten o'clock.

Amongst the guests was the Earl of Ellingham,—conspicuous by his fine form and handsome countenance, and more deserving of respect on account of his noble nature than by reason of his noble name: for a title is a thing which any monarch can bestow—but God alone can create the generous heart and the glorious intellect!

Lady Hatfield was likewise there; for, averse as she was to the assemblies of fashion, yet having received a card of invitation to this *re-union*, she could not refuse to obey the "royal commands."

And beautiful she appeared, too—with diamond sparkling on her hair, and in a dress which enhanced the loveliness of her complexion and set off her graceful figure and rounded bust to their utmost advantage.

She had accompanied the ladies of a noble family with whom she was intimately acquainted; and when the party was presented to the King, he contemplated Lady Hatfield with an admiration which he did not attempt to conceal. Indeed, he addressed himself particularly to her during the few minutes that he remained in conversation with the party to which she belonged. But other guests speedily



demanding his attention, and he moved away, not however without bestowing another long and even amorous look upon Georgiana, who felt relieved when the monarch was no longer near.

The Earl was speedily by Lady Hatfield's side, as soon as she was seated; and, after a few cursory observations upon the entertainment, she said to him, "Have you lately visited Mr. de Medina?"

"Not for the last two or three days," he replied. "I have been kept much at home by the necessity of preparing materials for the speech which I shall have to make on Monday evening next, on moving, according to the notice which I have already given in the House of Lords, for certain papers calculated to throw some light on the state of the industrious classes."

"You at last intend to shine as a great statesman, Arthur?" said Lady Hatfield, with a smile.

"I intend to apply myself to the grand subject of proposing those measures which may ameliorate the condition of millions of human beings," answered the Earl. "Do you not remember, Georgiana, that I told you how one whose name I need not mention, adjured me to do my duty as a British legislator? and have you forgotten that I explained to you the

deep impression which his language on that occasion made upon me?"

"I have forgotten nothing that you ever told me," answered Lady Hatfield; "and I am rejoiced to hear that you are now seriously resolved to apply your great talents to so useful a purpose. You must give the necessary orders to enable me to obtain admittance to the House of Lords on Monday evening next; for I would not for worlds be disappointed in hearing your sentiments upon so grand and important a question."

"If we were not in the light of sister and brother to each other, Georgiana, I should say that I am flattered by your words," remarked the Earl; "but, as it is, I can only assure you that I receive the expression of your desire to be present in the House of Lords next Monday, as a mark of that sincere attachment—that profound friendship which you bear towards me, and which is so entirely reciprocated."

"And have you reflected upon the conversation which occurred between us the other day relative to Miss Esther de Medina?" enquired Georgiana.

"I have," was the answer; "but as yet I have arrived at no decision."

"The next time you call upon me, then," said

Lady Hatfield, smiling, and yet subduing a sigh at the same moment, "I shall repeat to you all the arguments in that respect which I used on the former occasion. Now give me your arm, and we will walk into the next room through the open folding-doors of which I catch a glimpse of some fine paintings."

To the adjacent apartment they accordingly proceeded, and inspected several fine pictures, some by the old masters, and others by the most celebrated professors in modern art.

While they were thus engaged, the King approached them, greeted the Earl with urbane cordiality, and proceeded to point out to Lady Hatfield the best compositions amongst the works which she was admiring. The monarch then proposed that she should visit the Armoury; and as, when he had first approached, she had, through deference to Royalty,* relinquished the arm of the Earl of Ellingham, she was now compelled to accept that of the King. His Majesty, however, implied by his manner that Arthur was to accompany them; and the young nobleman accordingly followed the monarch and Georgiana to the Armoury.

As they passed through the rooms leading thither, many an envious glance was bent upon Lady Hatfield by the wives and daughters of aristocracy, each of whom would have given ten years of her life to obtain so much favour in the eyes of Royalty; although the King was, at this period, upwards of sixty-four years of age.

There was, nevertheless, nothing in Lady Hatfield's manner which indicated a consciousness of triumph: her deportment was modest, yet dignified—and manifesting that ease and self-possession which constitute such important proofs of good breeding.

"This is the first time that I have seen your ladyship at Carlton House," remarked the King, as they passed slowly on towards the Armoury.

"I have never had the honour of visiting your Majesty's palace until the present occasion," was the reply.

"You must not be forgotten in future," said the King: then slightly sinking his voice, he added, "A palace is the fitting region to be adorned by beauty such as you're."

Lady Hatfield affected not to hear the observation; and the Earl of Ellingham actually did not.

"I am an enthusiastic admirer of female loveliness," continued the King; "and I envy those who possess the talent of portraying upon canvas the features which are most dear to them. By the way," added his Majesty, as if a sudden idea had just struck him, "I intend to have a Diana painted for my Library. Beautiful Lady Hatfield, you must be the original of my Diana! Grant me that favour—I shall esteem it highly; and to-morrow Sir Thomas Lawrence shall call upon your ladyship to receive your commands relative to the first sitting."

"Your Majesty will deign to excuse me," said Georgiana, in a cold but profoundly respectful tone.

"Indeed, I shall receive no apology," observed the King, laughing. "But here we are in the Armoury; and it will give me infinite pleasure to direct your attention to those curiosities which are the worthiest of notice."

George the Fourth then pointed out to Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham, the swords which

had belonged respectively to the Chevalier Bayard, the great Duke of Marlborough, Louis XIV., that glorious patriot Hampden (would that we had such a man at the present time!), General Moreau, Marshal Luckner, and other heroes. There was also a hunting knife which had belonged to Charles XII. of Sweden; and in addition to these curiosities, there were many military antiquities, especially in costume, all of which the King explained to the lady and the Earl.

From time to time it struck Lady Hatfield that her royal companion pressed her arm gently in his own, and not in an accidental way, as he addressed himself to her; and he also looked at her more than once in a very peculiar manner. Had he been of a less exalted rank, she would have instantaneously quitted him; but she reflected that it would be an evidence of insane vanity and conceit on her part were she to interpret in a particular way attentions which after all might have nothing more than a common significance. She however remained cold, but respectful, and if the King really meant any thing more than the usual courtesy which a gentleman naturally pays to a lady, he received not the slightest encouragement.

"Ellingham," he said, turning abruptly towards the Earl, "do you carry a snuff-box?"

"I do not, sire," was the answer.

"That is provoking! I left mine on the porcelain table in the Chinese Drawing Room."

The young nobleman understood the hint, bowed, and departed to fetch the box—not however for a moment suspecting that the King had any sinister motive in sending him away from the Armoury, where his Majesty and Georgiana now remained alone together; for that museum had not been thrown open for the inspection of the guests generally.

"Beautiful Lady Hatfield," said George the Fourth, the moment the folding-doors had closed of their own accord behind the Earl, "you will consent to allow Lawrence to copy your sweet countenance for my Diana?"

"Your Majesty will deign to excuse me," was the cold and now reserved answer; for Georgiana's suspicions, previously excited in a faint degree, had gathered strength from the fact of her royal companion having got rid of the Earl in the manner already described.

"No—I will not excuse you, beautiful lady," exclaimed the King, enthusiastically—or with affected enthusiasm. "Your's is a countenance which, being seen once, leaves behind a desire to behold it again; and as I shall have no chance of often viewing the original, I must content myself with the contemplation of the picture."

"Your Majesty is pleased to compliment me thus," said Georgiana, more coldly than before: "and your Majesty is of course privileged. But such words, coming from a less exalted quarter, would be deemed offensive."

"I am unfortunate in not being able to render myself agreeable to Lady Hatfield," observed George the Fourth, drawing himself proudly up to his full height—for he was really piqued by the lady's manner—he who never sued in vain for a beauteous woman's smiles! But, probably reflecting that his haughtiness was little suited either to his previous conduct towards Georgiana or to his aims with regard to her, he immediately unbent again, saying in his blandest and most amiable tones, "Not for

* It is contrary to Court etiquette for a lady and gentleman to remain arm-in-arm when conversing with a Royal personage.

worlds would I offend you, charming lady: on the contrary, I would give worlds, did I possess them, to be able to win a single smile from those sweet lips."

Georgiana withdrew her hand from the King's arm, and became red with indignation.

"Forgive me—pardon me," said the monarch hastily: "I perceive that you are vexed with me—and I am very unfortunate in having offended you."

Thus speaking he again proffered his arm, which Lady Hatfield took, saying, "Would your Majesty deign to conduct me back to the company?"

At this moment the Earl of Ellingham returned to the Almoury, and handed the King his snuff-box. The party then retraced their way to the splendid saloons, the monarch conversing the while in a manner which seemed to indicate that Lady Hatfield had no ground to fear his recurrence to subjects that were disagreeable to her. At length he resigned her to the care of Lord Ellingham; but ere he turned away, he gave her a rapid and significant look, as much as to say, "I throw myself upon your generosity not to mention my conduct towards you."

The King now withdrew from the apartments thrown open for the reception of the company, and remained absent for nearly an hour. When he returned, his countenance was much flushed; and it was evident that he had been enjoying a glass or two of his favourite curagoa-punch, in company with a few boon-companions, who had been summoned to attend him in a private room remote from the state-saloons.

One of the boon-companions just alluded to, was a certain Sir Phillip Warren—an old courtier who was supposed to enjoy the confidence of the King, and who, it was rumoured, had been the means of extricating his royal master, when Prince of Wales, from many a difficulty in financial matters as well as from the danger of exposure in divers amatory intrigues. Without any defined official position about the person of the King, Sir Phillip was nevertheless a very important individual in the royal household—one of those useful, but mysterious agents who, while enjoying the reputation of men of honour, are in reality the means by which the dirty-work of palaces is accomplished. In appearance, Sir Phillip Warren was a stout, red-faced, good-humoured-looking man; and not the least of those qualifications which rendered him so especial a favourite with the King, was the aristocratic faculty that he possessed of taking his three bottles after dinner without seeming to have imbibed anything stronger than water.

Such was the courtier who, accosting the Earl of Ellingham, shortly after the King's return to the drawing-rooms, drew that nobleman aside with an intimation that he wished to say a few words to him in private.

Taking the Earl's arm, Sir Phillip Warren led him away from the brilliantly lighted saloons, and introduced the nobleman into the Blue Velvet Closet—a small but elegantly decorated room, where a single lamp was burning upon the table.

"His Majesty has been speaking to me concerning your lordship," said Sir Phillip Warren, when Arthur and himself were seated alone together in the Closet: "indeed, our royal master has been graciously pleased to intimate that he is much prepossessed in your favour."

The Earl bowed a cold recognition of the com-

pliment,—for he was far too enlightened a man not to feel disgust at the sycophantic language in which that compliment was conveyed—and he was likewise convinced that there was some ulterior object in view.

"A young nobleman such as your lordship, may rise to the highest offices in the State by means of the royal favour," continued Sir Phillip. "Your talents are known to be great—and your influence in the House of Lords is consequently extensive. But his Majesty regrets to learn that your lordship seems inclined to proclaim opinions so far in advance of the spirit of the age as to be dangerous to the institutions of the country—those institutions which the wisdom of our ancestors devised, and which the experience of ages has consecrated."

"Really, Sir Phillip Warren," said the Earl, unfeignedly surprised at this address, "I am at a loss to conceive wherefore you should seek to lead me into a political discussion on such an occasion as the present."

"I will explain myself," returned the courtier. "His Majesty retired just now, with a few of his faithful servants, amongst whom I have the honour to be included, to partake of a little refreshment; and while we were thus engaged, his Majesty made an observation highly in favour of yourself. A nobleman present thereupon informed his Majesty that your lordship had placed a certain notice upon the books of the House of which your lordship is so distinguished an ornament. The nature of that notice is displeasing to his Majesty, who is graciously pleased to think that the common people already consider themselves of far greater importance than they really are."

"If, sir, by the contemptuous phrase '*the common people*,' you mean that enlightened and respectable body—the *working classes*," exclaimed the Earl indignantly, "I must beg to declare that I differ totally from the opinion which his Majesty has expressed concerning them."

"Well—well, my dear Earl," said Sir Phillip, in a conciliatory tone: "every one has a right to his own opinion—we are aware of *that fact*. But permit me to represent to you that you will gain no personal advantage, by espousing the cause of the masses."

"I seek no personal advantage," cried Arthur, with an impatient gesture, indicative of his desire to terminate the interview at once. "I am not putting myself forward as a factious demagogue—I seek not the honours of a democratic championship: but *this* I intend and contemplate, Sir Phillip Warren—to exert all my energies, use all the little influence I may possess, and devote any amount of talent which God has given me, for the purpose of directing the attention of the Legislature to the neglected, oppressed and impoverished condition of that fine English people which constitutes the pillar of the State."

"By adopting such a course, my lord," remonstrated Sir Phillip, "you will offend his Majesty, who is now so well disposed towards you, that were you inclined to enter his service in the sphere of diplomacy, your wishes might be complied with at once. Indeed, the post of Envoy Plenipotentiary to the important Grand Duchy of Castelciaia is at this moment vacant; and if your lordship—"

"In one word, Sir Phillip Warren," interrupted the Earl of Ellingham, rising from his seat, "you are desirous to tempt me into a compromise. Wherefore

do you not frankly explain yourself at once, and say, 'Withdraw your notice from the books of the House of Lords, and depart as Ambassador to the Court of Angelo, Grand Duke of Castalcatala:' to which I should immediately reply, 'No possible reward which an earthly monarch can give, should induce me to abandon that task which a sense of duty has imposed upon me.'

Sir Phillip Warren was astonished at the firmness and boldness with which the Earl spoke, for such manly independence was quite unusual in the atmosphere of a corrupt Court and venal political world. The fact was that Sir Phillip had undertaken the task of effecting the desired compromise with the Earl: the King had specially entrusted the matter to him;—and the courtier trembled at the idea of being compelled to report the total failure of the negotiation to his royal master. He was therefore cruelly embarrassed, and knew not what course to adopt.

But suddenly an idea struck him;—for he perceived that the Earl was not a man to be tempted by reward; but he thought that the nobleman might perhaps be overcome by the powers of eloquent reasoning.

"My dear Earl," he accordingly said, "you are too honourable and too highly-principled a statesman not to yield to conviction. Grant me, in common justice, one favour. I ask it in the name of his Majesty."

"Speak," exclaimed Arthur, resuming his chair to show that he was prepared to listen with courteous attention.

"The Prime Minister is present at the re-union this evening," said Sir Phillip: "will you hear any argument which he may address to you upon the subject of your notice for next Monday night, and consider whatever may pass between you to be strictly confidential?"

"I should be unreasonable to refuse to listen to any observations which so high a functionary as the Prime Minister may address to me," answered the Earl; "and I shall consider our interview to be private and confidential, on condition that no insult be offered to me in the shape of temptation or promise of reward. If it can be shown by fair argument that I am wrong in pursuing the course which I have adopted, I will yield to conviction; but I shall spurn with contempt and indignation any other means that may be adopted to induce me to withdraw my notice from the books of the House."

"The interview shall take place upon the condition your lordship has stipulated. Be kind enough to await my return with the Prime Minister."

Sir Phillip Warren then withdrew closing the door behind him.

But scarcely had he left the Blue Velvet Closet, when the lamp upon the table suddenly grew dim; and in a few moments the light expired altogether, doubtless through lack of oil—leaving the room in total darkness.

The Earl was uncertain how to act; and while he was still deliberating with himself whether to leave the Closet in search of a servant to procure another light, or await the return of Sir Phillip Warren, the door opened.

"This room is in darkness, sire," immediately said a female voice, which the Earl of Ellingham recognised to be that of Lady Hatfield.

"I pledge you my royal word that I was ignorant

of the fact when I conducted you hither," returned the King. "But, pray enter, beauteous lady: we may at all events converse at our ease for a few minutes."

And to the amazement of the Earl, Georgiana complied with the King's request, accompanying his Majesty into that dark room, the door of which was immediately closed. Indeed, so astounded—so shocked was Arthur by this incident, that he sat motionless and speechless in his chair at the further extremity of the apartment.

"My dearest Lady Hatfield," said the King, "I thank you most sincerely for having thrown aside that chilling—freezing manner which you maintained in the early part of the evening, when I sought to make you understand the profound admiration with which your beauty has inspired me. How unfortunate are princes! They cannot obey the dictates of their hearts—they dare not bestow their hand where their affections are engaged. But society is justly lenient in their behalf; and thus the lady who becomes a monarch's favourite, is regarded with envy and respect, and not with contumely or reproach."

"But no lady who entertains the slightest feeling of self-respect," observed Lady Hatfield, in a low and tremulous tone, "will abandon herself in a moment even to a monarch. There must be proofs of real attachment on his side—"

"Granted, beauteous Georgiana," interrupted the King impatiently. "Show me how I can demonstrate my affection towards yourself—ask me any boon which I have the power to grant, and which I dare accord—"

"Oh! if your Majesty would only fulfil this pledge!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield joyfully.

"Do you doubt me?" demanded George the Fourth. "Put me to the test, I say—and you shall be convinced of my readiness, my anxiety to prove how deeply I am attached to you, although the impression made on my heart be so sudden."

"Sire," resumed Lady Hatfield, "I shall be so bold as to take your Majesty at your word. Tomorrow your Majesty will receive a certain paper; and I warn your Majesty beforehand that its contents will be most singular."

"I shall ask no farther explanations than you may choose to give, beauteous Georgiana," observed the King. "But when I receive the paper, what next do you require?"

"That your Majesty shall affix to it your royal signature, and likewise direct your Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department to countersign it," responded Lady Hatfield. "This being done, the document must be returned to me."

"All that you have stipulated, shall be carried into effect," said the King: then, sinking his voice and assuming a tender tone, he added, "But will there be room for me to hope, sweet lady—"

"Your Majesty must remember the observation I made ere now," interrupted Georgiana. "Before a woman, whose affection is really worthy of being possessed, can consent to surrender herself entirely even to one so highly placed as you, sire, her heart must be won by kindnesses shown—by proofs of attachment given—"

"I accept the condition implied, charming Georgiana," exclaimed the King. "You imagine that I am now influenced by a sudden caprice—that the love which I bear for you is the phantasy of a mo-

ment. Well—I will convince you to the contrary; and when I shall have proved to you that my passion survives the passing hour—then—then, sweet lady, you will not suffer me to hope in vain! Come—let us return to the drawing-room; and believe me when I declare that you have made me supremely happy. But, ere we again seek that society where a cold ceremony must keep us under a rigid restraint, allow me to seal upon your lips that pledge for which I have already given my royal word."

"No, sire—not now—not yet!" cried Lady Hatfield, in a tone which showed that she felt herself to be in a position to dictate to her regal admirer.

"Cruel charmer!" said the King: "but I suppose you must be permitted to have your own way. Send me the paper to-morrow—let it be addressed to me under cover to Sir Phillip Warren;—and you shall see by the haste with which it will be returned to you, that I shall count every minute an hour, and reckon every day to be a year, until that happy moment comes when you will be wholly and solely mine."

George the Fourth then opened the door, and led Georgiana away from the room in which this singular scene had taken place.

But what of the Earl of Ellingham?

So completely stunned and stupefied was he by all that had occurred, that he never moved a muscle and retained his very breath suspended while his ears drank in every word that passed between the King and Lady Hatfield. Thus did he become an unwilling and unintentional listener to a discourse which created the most painful emotions in his breast.

Was it possible that the Lady Hatfield whom he looked upon as the very personification of virtue, in spite of the terrible misfortune which had deprived her of her chastity,—was it possible that she, whose soul he had imagined to be so pure, though dwelling in a body polluted by the ravisher,—was it possible that she had already suffered herself to be dazzled by the delusive overtures of royalty? and was she seriously about to resign herself to the King's arms—to become the mistress of that regal debauchee of sixty-four?

"My God!" thought the Earl: "I, who had such an exalted opinion of female virtue!"

Then he remembered that portion of the conversation which had turned upon the document Lady Hatfield was to send to the King for his royal signature, and which she had prepared him to find of a most singular character. Of what nature could that document be? Conjecture was vain and useless.

The first impulse of the Earl was to inform Lady Hatfield that he had overheard her conversation with the King, and conjure her to reflect seriously ere she committed a fatal step, of which she would assuredly have to repent for the remainder of her life. But second thoughts convinced him that he must retain profoundly secret the fact of his acquaintance with the understanding existing between Georgiana and the monarch; for in confessing himself to have been an eaves-dropper, he should have to blush in the presence of one whom he was to take to task. He saw it would be difficult to make the lady believe that he himself was so stupefied by her conduct, as to be totally unable to declare his presence in a room where a private conversation was in progress; and she would naturally upbraid him, he thought, for

what might be looked upon as a proof of mean and contemptible curiosity on his part—although, as the reader is aware, he was indeed animated by no such vile sentiment.

Moreover, in resigning all claim to her hand—or rather, in recognising the impossibility of contracting an alliance with a woman whom his brother had ravished—the Earl had ceased to enjoy any right to advise or control her in respect to her moral conduct;—and it now struck him that, painfully situated as she was—unable to become the wife of any honourable and confiding man—she had accepted overtures which would render her a monarch's mistress. In a word, he conceived that he should best consult her happiness, as matters stood, by affecting a complete ignorance of the understanding so suddenly established between herself and George the Fourth.

Having come to this determination, he quitted the Blue Velvet Closet, and was retracing his way to the scene of brilliant gaiety, when he encountered Sir Phillip Warren in the corridor.

"I searched every where for the Minister, and was unable to find him," said the courtier. "At last, upon making enquiries, I learnt that he had taken his departure."

"I am not sorry that it is so," returned the Earl of Ellingham; "for I feel convinced that no argument, although I should have listened to it as a matter of courtesy, could deter me from advocating the cause of the working classes."

With these words the nobleman bowed coldly to Sir Phillip Warren, and passed on to the state-apartments, in one of which he found Lady Hatfield seated with the friends in whose company she had arrived at the entertainment.

Her manner was calm and collected; and if there were any change, it was in the slight—the very slight smile of triumph which played upon her lip:—at least, it struck the Earl that such an expression her rosy mouth wore, as he approached her. But it disappeared as she began to converse with him; and he so subdued his own feelings, that she did not observe any thing to lead her to suppose that he was aware of her understanding with the King.

Precisely at midnight the supper-rooms were thrown open; and a magnificent banquet was served up. We need scarcely say that the most costly wines, the most expensive luxuries, and every delicacy that gold could procure, appeared upon the board, which absolutely groaned beneath the weight of massive plate, superb porcelain, and brilliant crystal.

The festivity was kept up until a late hour: indeed it was past two in the morning before the company began to separate.

But when the Earl of Ellingham was once more at home, and had retired to his chamber, sleep would not visit his eyes, fatigued though he were:—the scene which had occurred in the Blue Velvet Closet was so impressed upon his mind, that he could not divert his thoughts into another channel. It was not that he was jealous of Lady Hatfield:—no—circumstances had changed his love for her into a sincere and deeply-rooted friendship. But he felt disappointed—he felt deceived in the estimate he had formed of her character: he had believed her to be possessed of a mind too strong to be dazzled by the splendours of Royalty, and to yield herself up to a

man whom it was impossible for her to love, merely for the sake of becoming a King's mistress.

Had George the Fourth been estimable on account of character, amiable in disposition, and worthy of admiration as a sovereign, the Earl thought that there would in this case have been a shadow—but even then, only a shadow—of an excuse for the conduct of Georgiana. The reverse, was, however, the precise fact;—for the King was notoriously a hardened profligate—a confirmed debauchee—a disgusting voluptuary—and an unprincipled monarch,—in a word, such a man as a refined and strong-minded woman would look upon with abhorrence.

So thought Lord Ellingham;—and when he recalled to memory the frightful behaviour of George the Fourth towards the unhappy Caroline, against whom his vile agents trumped up the most unfounded accusations, and who was hunted to death by the blood-thirsty instruments of a hellish system of persecution,—when the Earl reflected upon all this, his amazement at the conduct of Lady Hatfield increased almost to horror.

At length his thoughts wandered to Esther de Medina—or rather, the beautiful Jewess became mixed up with them; for it was impossible that the scene in the Blue Velvet Closet could be entirely banished from his mind;—and, as he pondered upon *her* innocence—*her* artlessness—*her* amiable qualities, his confidence in woman revived, and he exclaimed aloud, as he lay in his sumptuous couch, “Oh! wherefore do I delay securing to myself the possession of such a treasure? Yes, Esther—dearest Esther—thou shalt be mine!”

CHAPTER XCVIII.

AN ACQUITTAL AND A SENTENCE.

THE Blackamoor, in his mysterious abode, beheld the successful progress of his grand schemes; and while all London was busy with conjectures relative to the daring unknown who seemed to have constituted himself the instrument of justice and the champion of innocence wrongly accused, the object of this general interest and curiosity remained in impervious concealment.

The Secretary of State offered a reward of two hundred pounds to any one that should give such information as to lead to the discovery of the person who had enticed Sir Christopher Blunt to his unknown abode, and who had caused Dr. Lascelles to be conveyed thither by force; and the most astute Bow Street agents were employed in instituting enquiries in every part of the metropolis with a view to find out the dwelling of the individual in question.

The newspapers teemed with the most absurd and contradictory reports on the subject; and a thousand wild rumours were constantly circulating throughout the metropolis. The result of all this was that those who were employed in the enquiries above alluded to, were so mystified and bewildered, that they worked like drunken men in the dark,—taking up and following any ridiculous information which they obtained either from wags or from persons who wished to appear more knowing than their neighbours,—and pursuing what at first might seem to be a clue, but which invariably led to nothing satisfactory at last.

The Blackamoor's own retainers, who were all faithful to their master, augmented this confusion of rumours and ideas, by mingling amongst the gossips in places of public resort, and gravely propagating reports which were sure to direct the attention of the Bow Street runners from the very point where its object lay; and all that Dr. Lascelles had been known to hazard in the shape of conjecture in the matter, was a hint that, to the best of his belief, the carriage in which he had been borne away on the memorable night of the confession, had eventually stopped in one of the most easterly suburbs of the metropolis. The consequence of this suggestion was, that Wapping, Whitechapel, Bethnal Green, and Globe Town were regularly explored by the Bow Street officials—but entirely without success.

Although the innocence of Mr. Torrens was universally believed, yet, as he had been committed for trial, it was necessary that he should undergo the ordeal. This ceremony took place a few days after the publication of the confession of the real murderers—indeed, on the very Monday following the grand entertainment at Carlton House.

The prisoner was arraigned on the charge of having assassinated Sir Henry Courtenay; and the Recorder of London presided on the bench. The counsel for the prosecution merely stated the particulars of the discovery of the corpse of the deceased baronet, and the circumstances which had led to the prisoner's committal; but he did not for a moment insist that those circumstances were conclusive against him. Sir Christopher Blunt then detailed in evidence all that he had given in narrative at Bow Street; and Dr. Lascelles corroborated his statement. The confession signed by Joshua Pedler and Timothy Splint, and likewise the one in which Martha Torrens had attested to certain facts in favour of the prisoner, were read by the clerk of arraigns; and the counsel for the defence was about to address the Court, when the jury declared that their minds were already made up.

The *acquittal* of the prisoner immediately followed; and the first person who shook hands with him as he was released from the dock, was Sir Christopher Blunt.

Mr. Torrens accepted a seat in the knight's carriage, and repaired to a friend's house in the neighbourhood, where Clarence Villiers, Adelaïs, Rosamond, and Esther de Medina were assembled to welcome his acquittal, relative to which none of them had felt at all uneasy.

But it was evident that, although thus relieved from the dreadful charge and appalling danger which had recently hung over him, Mr. Torrens was an altered man. He had received a blow which had shaken his constitution to its very basis:—his mental energies were impaired;—and instead of a hale man of between fifty-five and fifty-six, which was his actual age, he seemed to be a feeble, tottering octogenarian.

When the excitement produced by the meeting with his family after his release had somewhat subsided, Mr. Torrens said with nervous impatience, “Rosamond, my dear child, I shall leave England this very day. Will you accompany your father?”

“Leave us the moment you are restored to us!” exclaimed Adelaïs, bursting into tears.

“Yes—yes,” returned the unhappy man: “I cannot—dare not remain in England. Though released

from a criminal gaol, yet I am in danger of being plunged into a debtors' prison; for I am ruined, as you all know—totally, irredeemably ruined. Besides—never, never again could I dwell in that house where so many frightful things have occurred. Yes," he repeated, "I must leave England at once; and you, my poor Rosamond," he added, with tears trickling down his sunken cheeks, "will have to support your father, by means of your accomplishments, in a foreign land."

"No—that must not be," said Esther de Medina, passing a handkerchief rapidly over her eyes: "Rosamond has friends to whom, although they have known her but for so short a period, her welfare is dear. Foreseeing some such decision as that to which you have now come, relative to leaving England, my father has desired me to place a thousand pounds at your daughter's disposal," continued the beautiful Jewess, addressing herself to the wondering Torrens, and at the same time placing a sealed packet in Rosamond's hands.

"Oh! my generous—my excellent-hearted friend," exclaimed Rosamond, embracing the Jewess tenderly: "how is it possible that I could have merited this kindness—this extraordinary bounty at your hands?"

"We are fellow-creatures, though of a different creed," said Esther modestly;—but she was compelled to receive the thanks of the astonished Torrens and of the admiring Clarence and Adelaïs.

Villiers now drew his father-in-law aside, and spoke to him concerning Mrs. Torrens.

"I cannot see her, Clarence—I cannot meet her again," he replied. "Besides, an interview would be useless. Our marriage was not one of affection, as you are well aware: and, moreover—But," he added, suddenly interrupting himself, and looking tremblingly in the young man's face, while his voice sank to a low, hollow whisper,—“she has doubtless told you *all*?”—and then he glanced toward Rosamond, who was conversing with Esther de Medina and Adelaïs at the farther end of the room.

"Yes—I know *all*," returned Villiers; and the words seemed to convulse his wretched listener with horror. "But it is too late to amend the past—and it is not for me to reproach you *now*. Your own conscience, Mr. Torrens, will prove a sufficient punishment for the frightful wrong you have done to that poor girl. And fear not that I shall impart the sickening truth to my wife, who is already too deeply affected by all that has lately occurred."

"Thank you, Clarence—thank you, at least for that assurance," said the old man, his voice almost suffocated with terrible emotions. "You perceive how impossible it is that I should remain in England—with so many dreadful reminiscences to make me ashamed to look those who know me in the face. This very instant will Rosamond and myself set out on our way to a foreign land: you will be kind enough to send my trunks after me to Dover."

"I do not attempt to dissuade you from this step," observed Villiers; because I can see no more agreeable alternative."

Mr. Torrens' decision was then communicated to the three ladies: and the farewell scene between the sisters was affecting in the extreme. Nor less did Adelaïs deplore the necessity which compelled her to separate from her father; but she at least had a consolation in the midst of her grief—a solace

in the possession of a husband who loved her devotedly, and whom she adored.

A post-chaise was speedily in attendance: and Mr. Torrens took his departure from the English capital, in company with his younger daughter.

Esther de Medina did not take leave of Clarence and Adelaïs before she had made them promise to pay her an early visit at Finchley Manor; and the young couple returned to Torrens Cottage more than ever prepossessed in favour of the beautiful Jewess, who seemed to delight only in doing good.

On the ensuing day Martha Torrens was placed in the dock, before the Recorder of London, charged with the crime of forgery.

The court of the Old Bailey was crowded with persons belonging to those religious associations of which the prisoner had lately been so conspicuous a member. There was Mr. Jonathan Pugwash, President of the *South Sea Islands Bible-Circulating Society*, not only with a face indicative of its owner's attachment to brandy, but also with a breath smelling very strongly of that special liquor: there also was the Reverend Malachi Sawkins, looking so awfully miserable at the scandal brought by the prisoner's conduct on the religious world, that a stranger would have supposed him to be at least her brother, if not her husband;—and there likewise was the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks, who, having made his peace with the members of the above-mentioned Society, had latterly come out much stronger than ever in the shape of a saint. Many other sleek and oily, or thin and pale, religious gentlemen were present on this occasion; and in the gallery were numerous old ladies, all belonging to the ultra-evangelical school, and who appeared to divide their attention between the task of wiping their eyes with white cambric handkerchiefs and strengthening their nerves by means of frequent applications to little flasks or bottles which they took from their pockets or muffs.

Mrs. Torrens was supported into the dock by two turnkeys of Newgate; for she was overcome with shame and grief at the position in which her crime had placed her. She was indeed a pitiable object; and it was evident that, whatever penalty the Bench might award, her punishment in this world had already begun.

The indictment being read, she pleaded *Guilty* in a faint voice; and the prosecutors strongly recommended her to mercy.

The Recorder* put on the black cap, and proceeded to address the prisoner in a most feeling manner. His lordship said that the law left him no alternative but to pronounce sentence of death. He however observed that, considering the contrition manifested by the plea of *Guilty* and the intercession of the bankers who had been defrauded of their money by the forgery, he should recommend the prisoner to the mercy of the Crown. His lordship concluded by an intimation that she must make up her mind to pass the remainder of her days as an exile in the penal settlements, but that her life would be spared.

* At the period of which we are writing, this high civic functionary tried cases involving capital penalties as well as those of a less serious nature. Since the establishment of the Central Criminal Court, the great judges of the kingdom preside at the Old Bailey to try prisoners charged with grave offences.

She was conveyed in a fainting state away from the dock; and the religious gentlemen present gave so awful and simultaneous a groan, that the judge was quite startled upon the bench, and the jury were horrified in their box.

CHAPTER XC.

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASSES.

In the afternoon of that same Monday on which Mr. Torrens was acquitted and his wife condemned, vast crowds collected in the vicinity of the Houses of Parliament.

The multitude consisted chiefly of members of the industrious classes, many individuals being accompanied by their wives and children. They were attired in the best raiment that they possessed; and their conduct was most orderly and creditable.

At about a quarter to five o'clock the carriages began to arrive and set down at the respective entrances the Members of the two Houses of Parliament: some, however, proceeded thither on horseback; and others on foot. The crowds neither cheered the popular, nor hissed the unpopular legislators who thus passed through the mass which had divided to make way for them; until at last one long, hearty, and glorious outburst welcomed the appearance of the Earl of Ellingham, as he proceeded on horseback, attended by his groom, to St. Stephen's.

The young nobleman acknowledged this outpouring of a people's gratitude—not with a patronising condescension, but with an affability which seemed to say, "I am one of yourselves—we're all equal—and I am proud of being considered your friend."

Long after he had entered the portals of the House of Lords, and was lost to the public view, did the cheering continue outside; for the multitudes appreciated all that was great and generous in the task which a member of a proud aristocracy had undertaken to perform that day in their behalf.

There was a full attendance of Peers, Temporal and Spiritual; and the strangers' galleries, overlooking the throne and the woolsack, were crowded with fashionable gentlemen and elegantly dressed ladies. Amongst the audience there assembled, were Lady Hatfield, Mr. de Medina, and Esther Georgiana was not however seated near the Jew and his daughter, she being unacquainted with them otherwise than by name, as the reader is already aware.

Soon after five o'clock the Earl of Ellingham rose from his seat, advanced towards the table, and proceeded to address the House on the motion of which he had given notice.

He began by expressing a regret that so important a subject as that which he proposed for discussion—namely, the condition of the industrious population—should not have been taken up by some noble lord more competent than himself to do it adequate justice; and he declared most solemnly that no selfish idea of obtaining popularity had influenced him in the course which he was pursuing. He then proceeded to expatiate upon the state of the working classes, and to urge upon the House the necessity of adopting measures to ameliorate their lamentable condition. It was too frequently alleged,

he observed, that those classes were thoughtless, improvident, ungrateful, and intellectually dull; but this assertion he emphatically denied. Despair, produced by their unhappy condition, naturally led to dissipation in many instances; but were the working-man placed in a position so that his livelihood should be rendered less precarious than it now was—were his labour adequately remunerated—were he more fairly paid by the representatives of property—were a scale of wages established, having a fixed *minimum*, but no fixed *maximum*, the increased comfort thus ensured to him would naturally remove from his mind those cares which drove him to the public-house. His lordship would have no fixed *maximum* of wages, because wages ought always to be increased in proportion to the value of productive labour to employers: but he would have a *minimum* established, to obviate the cruel and disastrous effects of those periods when labour exceeded the demand in the market. This could not be considered unfair towards employers, because when the markets were brisk and trade was flourishing, they (the employers) reaped the greatest benefit from that activity, and enriched themselves in a very short time: therefore, when markets were dull and trade was stagnant, they should still be compelled to pay such wages as would enable their employed to live comfortably. The profits gained during prosperous seasons not only enabled employers to enjoy handsome incomes, but also to accumulate considerable savings; and as the best wages scarcely enabled the employed to make any thing like an adequate provision for periods of distress, it was not fair that the representatives of property should use the labour of the working classes just when it suited them, and discard it or only use it on a miserable recompense when it did not so well suit them. For the labour of the employed not only made annual incomes for the employers, but also permanent fortunes; and the value of that labour should not be calculated as lasting only just as long as it was available for the purpose of producing large profits. Labour was the working man's *capital*, and should have constant interest, as well as money placed in the funds—that interest of course increasing in proportion to the briskness of markets; but never depreciating below a standard value—much less being discarded as valueless altogether, in times of depression. A thousand pounds would always obtain three per cent. interest, under any circumstances; and, at particular periods, might be worth six or seven per cent. Labour should be considered in the same light. Stagnant markets diminished the profits of employers, but did not ruin them: if they did not obtain profit enough to live upon, they had the accumulations of good seasons to fall back upon. But how different was the case with the employed! To them stagnation of business was ruin—starvation—death;—the breaking up of their little homes—the sudden check of their children's education—the cause of demoralisation and degradation—and the terrible necessity of applying to the parish! The supply and demand of labour were necessarily unequal at many times, and in many districts; and the Government should therefore adopt measures to prevent those frightful fluctuations in wages which carried desolation into the homes of thousands of hard-working, industrious, and deserving families. In fact, a law should be passed to ensure the working-man



against the casualty of being employed at a price below remuneration. In England the poor were not allowed to have a stake in the country—there were no small properties—the land was in the possession of a few individuals comparatively, and thus the landed interest constituted a tremendous monopoly, most unjust and oppressive to the industrious classes. The only way to remove this evil influence, and ameliorate the condition of the working population—the only way to countervail the disastrous effect of that monopoly, short of a Revolution which would treble or quadruple the number of landed proprietors,—was to compel property to maintain labour as long as labour sought for employment and occupation. The noble Earl then proceeded to state that if the working-classes were thus treated, they would not be driven by their cares and troubles to the excessive use of alcoholic liquors: they would not become demoralised by being compelled to migrate from place to place in search of employment—going upon the tramp, sleeping in hideous dens of vice, where numbers were forced to herd together without reference to age or sex: they would not be unsettled in all their little arrangements to bring up their children creditably and with the due reference to

instructions;—they would not be made discontented, anxious for any change no matter what, vindictive towards that society which thus rendered them outcasts, and sullen or reckless in their general conduct. But as things now were, the industrious man never felt settled: he knew that the hut which he called his home, was held on the most precarious tenure;—he felt the sickening conviction that if he had bread and meat to-day, he might have only bread to-morrow, and no food at all the day after. It was positively frightful to contemplate the condition of mental uncertainty, anxiety, and apprehension in which millions of persons were thus existing; and those who reproached them with recklessness or sullenness, should blame themselves as the causes of all that they vituperated. Lord Ellingham next proceeded to show that although there had been a vast increase of wealth and comfort amongst the middle and upper classes, yet the condition of the industrious millions was not only unimproved, but had positively deteriorated. The population was increasing at the rate of one thousand souls a day—and pauperism was keeping pace with that increase. Unrepresented in Parliament—without any means of making their voices heard—positively

incapacitated from having a stake in the country, the industrious millions were the mere slaves and tools of the wealthy classes. Thus an immense mass of persons was kept in bondage—in absolute serfdom by an oligarchy. Was such a state of things just? was it rational? was it even humane? The millions were ground down by indirect taxes, in which shape they actually contributed more to the revenue, in proportion to their means, than the rich. The only luxuries which the poor enjoyed, and which had become as it were necessities,—namely, tea, sugar, tobacco, beer, and spirits,—were the most productive sources of revenue. If noble lords reproached the poor for dirty habits, as he well knew that it was their custom to do, he would ask them why soap was made an article subject to so heavy a tax? It was a contemptible fallacy to suppose that because the poor contributed little or nothing in the shape of direct taxation to the revenue, they were positively untaxed. He would again declare that the poor paid more in indirect taxes than the rich did in both direct and inirect ways, when the relative means of the two parties were taken into consideration. From these subjects the Earl passed to the consideration of the inequality of the laws, and the incongruity, severity, and injustice of their administration towards the poor. Every advantage was given to the rich in the way of procuring bail in those cases where security for personal appearance was required; but no poor man could possibly give such security. He must go to prison, and there herd with felons of the blackest dye. Perhaps on trial his innocence would transpire; and then what recompense had he for his long incarceration—his home broken up during his absence—and his ruined family? It was possible—nay, it often happened that a man would be thus in prison for four or five months previously to trial; and during that period it would be strange indeed if he escaped gaol contamination. Then, again, there were offences of a comparatively venial kind, and for which penalties might be inflicted in the shape of fines, the alternative being imprisonment. These fines were insignificant trifles in the estimation of a rich man; but the smallest of them was quite a fortune in the eyes of the poor. Even a person with a hundred a-year would pay a fine of five pounds rather than go to prison for a month or six weeks: but a labouring man, earning ten or twelve shillings a week, could no more satisfy the demand thus made upon him than he could influence the motion of the earth,—unless, indeed, he pawned and pledged every little article belonging to him; and the infliction thereby became a blow which he never afterwards recovered. Did a poor man offend a clergyman, he was forthwith put into the Spiritual Court, as the common saying was; and the expensive proceedings, which he could not stay, involved him in utter ruin. When a poor man was oppressed by a rich one, it was vain and ludicrous to assert that the Courts of Law were open to him: law was a luxury in which only those who possessed ample means could indulge. In a case where some greivous injury was sustained by a poor man—the seduction of his wife or daughter, for instance—redress or recompense was impossible, unless some attorney took up the case on speculation; and this was a practice most demoralizing and pernicious. But if left entirely unassisted in that respect, the poor man could no more go to Westminster Hall than he could afford to dine at Long's

Hotel. With regard to the subject of education, the noble Earl declared that it was positively shocking to think that such care should be taken to convert negroes to Christianity thousands of miles off, while the most deplorable ignorance prevailed at home. The Church enjoyed revenues the amount of which actually brought the ministers of the gospel into discredit, as evidencing their avaricious and grasping disposition;—while the people remained as uneducated as if not a single shilling were devoted to spiritual pastors or lay instructors. He boldly accused both Houses of Parliament and the upper classes generally of being anxious to keep the masses in a state of ignorance. Where instruction was imparted gratuitously, it was entirely of a sectarian nature; just as if men required to study grammar, history, arithmetic, or astronomy on Church of England principles. The whole land was over-run by clergymen, who lived upon the fat of it—Universities and public schools had been richly endowed for the purpose of propagating knowledge and encouraging learning,—and yet the people were lamentably ignorant. It was a wicked and impudent falsehood to declare that they were intellectually dull or averse to mental improvement. Common sense—that best of sense—was the special characteristic of the working classes; and those who could read, were absolutely greedy in their anxiety to procure books, newspapers, and cheap publications for perusal. The fact was, that the mind of the industrious population was a rich soil wherein all good seed would speedily take root, shoot up, and bring forth fruit to perfection: but the apprehensions or narrow prejudices of the upper classes—the oligarchy—would not permit the seed to be sown. Now, as the soil must naturally produce something, even of its own accord, it too often gave birth to rank weeds; and this was made a matter of scorn, reviling, and reproach. But the real objects of that scorn—that reviling—and that reproach, were those who obstinately and wickedly neglected to put the good soil to the full test of fertilization. Lastly, the Earl of Ellingham directed attention to the state of the criminal laws. These were only calculated to produce widely spread demoralization—to propagate vice—to render crime terribly prolific. A man—no matter what his offence might have been—should be deemed innocent and untainted again, when he had paid the penalty of his misdeed; because to brand a human being eternally, was to fly in the face of the Almighty and assert that there should be no such thing as forgiveness, and was no such thing as repentance. But the nature of punishments in this country was so to brand the individual, and so to dare the Majesty of Heaven. For the gaols were perfect nests of infamy—sinks of iniquity, imprisonment in which necessarily fastened an indelible stigma upon the individual. He either came forth tainted; or else it was supposed that he must be so. Under these circumstances, he vainly endeavoured to obtain employment; and, utterly failing in his attempt to earn an honest livelihood, he was compelled perforce to relapse into habits of crime and lawlessness. This fact accounted for an immense amount of the demoralization which the Bishops so much deplored, but the true causes of which they obstinately refused to acknowledge. The criminal gaols were moral pest-houses, in which no cures were effected, but where the contagious malady became more virulent. Society should not immerse

offenders solely for the sake of punishment—but with a view to reformation of character. The noble Earl then summed up his arguments by stating that he was anxious to see measures adopted for a *minimum* rate of wages, to prevent the sudden fluctuation of wages, and to compel property to give constant employment to labour:—he was desirous that indirect taxes upon the necessaries of life should be abolished;—he wished the laws and their administration to be more equitably proportioned to the relative conditions of the rich and the poor;—he insisted upon the want of a general system of national education, to be intrusted to laymen, and to be totally distinct from religious instruction and sectarian tenets;—he desired a complete reformation in the system of prison discipline, and explained the paramount necessity of founding establishments for the purpose of affording work to persons upon leaving criminal gaols, as a means of their obtaining an honest livelihood and retrieving their characters prior to seeking employment for themselves;—and he hoped that the franchise would be so extended as to give every man who earned his own bread by the sweat of his brow, a stake and interest in the country's welfare. The noble Earl wound up with an eloquent peroration in which he vindicated the industrious millions from the aspersions, misrepresentations, and calumnies which it seemed to be the fashion for the upper classes to indulge in against them; and he concluded by moving a number of resolutions in accordance with the heads of his oration.

The Earl's speech was received with very partial cheering by the assembled Lords, to whom its tenor was most unpalatable: but such was its effect upon the auditors in the strangers' galleries, that, contrary to the established etiquette, it was loudly applauded by them. The Lord Chancellor immediately called to order; and in a few minutes a dead silence reigned throughout the House.

The leading Minister present then rose to answer the Earl's oration; which he did in the usual style adopted by official men under such circumstances. Entirely blinking all the main arguments, he declaimed loudly in favour of the prosperity of the country—dwelt upon the happiness of English cottagers—lauded the "wisdom of our ancestors"—uttered the invariable cant about our "glorious institutions"—spoke of Church and State as if they were Siamese twins whom it would be death to sever—and, after calling upon the House to resist the Earl of Ellingham's motion, sat down.

Several noble Lords and Right Reverend Fathers in God took part in the discussion; and at length the House divided, when the Earl's motion was of course lost by an overwhelming majority against it. Arthur was by no means disappointed: he had foreseen this result—but he had made up his mind to renew the subject as often as he could, in the full hope that a steady perseverance would ultimately be crowned with success.

The House adjourned—the stranger's galleries were speedily cleared—and the Lords, Spiritual and Temporal, rolled home in their carriages, the multitudes, who still remained assembled in the vicinity of St. Stephen's, preserving a profound silence, until the Earl of Ellingham was observed to issue forth by those persons who were nearest to the Lords' entrance. Then arose a shout more loud—more hearty even than that which had greeted his arrival a few hours previously: it was the voice of a gen-

rous and grateful people, expressing the sincerest thanks for the efforts which the noble patriot had exerted in their cause.

CHAPTER C.

THE EARL OF ELLINGHAM AND ESTHER DE MEDINA.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon of the day following the scene just described, that the Earl of Ellingham and Esther de Medina were walking in the gardens attached to Finchley Manor.

The beautiful Jewess leant upon the arm of that fine young nobleman who had suddenly appeared before the world in the light of the champion of the industrious classes.

Never had Esther seemed so ravishingly lovely as on this occasion:—a rich carnation hue tinged her cheeks, beneath the clear, transparent olive of her complexion; and her fine large black eyes mirrored the enthusiasm of her soul, as she listened to her companion, who was expatiating upon the wrongs and sufferings endured by the sons and daughters of toil.

Her generous heart beat in entire sympathy with his own in this respect. Until the previous evening she had known little more of the condition of the people than is generally gleaned by young ladies of good education from the works which they peruse. But the Earl's lucid and convincing exposure had shed a marvellous light upon her soul: she comprehended how much the industrious millions were neglected by the Government—how sorely they were oppressed by a selfish, grasping, greedy oligarchy—how noble a task it was which the Earl had imposed upon himself.

His brilliant eloquence—his logical reasoning—the tone of deep conviction in which he had spoken—the conscientious earnestness of his manner—and the honest fervour that animated him when, having disposed of the more argumentative portion of his speech, he burst forth in his impassioned peroration,—all this had made a profound impression upon Esther de Medina. For hitherto her gentle heart had loved him for all those qualities of person and of mind which usually engender tender feelings in the maiden's bosom: but now she felt that she could adore him—that she could worship him as a hero who had stood forth in honest championship of a cause which it was so glorious to undertake.

Therefore was it that her cheeks were tinged with the carnation glow of youthful enthusiasm: therefore was it that her fine dark eyes flashed with the fires of so generous a fervour, as she now dwelt upon every word that the nobleman was uttering in reiteration of those sentiments which he had so boldly enunciated the night before.

But by degrees the conversation took a different and more tender turn; and as they entered an avenue of trees verdant with the foliage of an early Spring, the nobleman found himself speaking in obedience to those feelings of admiration which he experienced towards the beautiful Jewess.

"It was not to treat you with a political disquisition, Miss de Medina," said the Earl, "that I came hither to-day. I had another and very different object in view; for I am about to ask you to bestow upon me a boon which, if accorded, shall ever—ever be most highly prized. Esther—dearest Esther—"

added the nobleman, sinking his voice to a tender whisper, and gazing upon her affectionately, "it is this fair hand which I solicit!"

"Oh! my lord," murmured Esther, casting down her swimming eyes, while she felt that her cheeks were burning with blushes, "you have not well considered the step which you are now taking."

"I have reflected deeply upon the course which I am adopting," answered the nobleman, "and I am convinced that my happiness depends upon your reply. Tell me, Esther dearest—can you love me? Will you accept me as your husband?"

"Did I consult only my own heart, my lord," replied the beautiful Jewess, her countenance still suffused in virgin blushes, and her voice tremulously melodious, "I should not hesitate how to reply—oh! how could I? But I cannot forget, my lord, that I am the daughter of a despised—a persecuted—a much maligned race,—that the prejudices of your country and your creed are hostile to such an alliance as this, the proposal of which has done me so much honour."

"You are well aware, my beloved Esther," said the Earl, "that I have none of those absurd prejudices. The proudest Christian who wears a crown might glory in being the son-in-law of such a man as Mr. de Medina, and, even were he otherwise than what he is, it were a worthy aim of ambition to become the husband of his daughter Esther."

"I am well aware, my lord," resumed Esther, "that your heart harbours every noble and ennobling sentiment—that you are all that is great, and liberal, and good. Proud and happy, then, must that woman esteem herself who shall be destined to bear your name. But not for me, my lord—not for the despised Jewess must that supreme honour be reserved. No," she continued, her voice faltering, and her bosom heaving convulsively,—"no, my lord,—it may not be!"

"Esther," exclaimed the Earl of Ellingham, in an impassioned tone, "tell me—I conjure you—is this the only motive which induces you to hesitate? Is it simply on account of those absurd prejudices which my illiberal fellow-countrymen entertain in reference to your race? is it solely on this account that you deny me the boon I demand?"

"That reason—and another," murmured the lovely Jewess, in a low—hesitating—and tremulous tone.

"Ah! that other—I can divine it!" cried the young nobleman. "You know that I was engaged to Lady Hatfield;—but that engagement exists no longer—has ceased to exist for some time! I will not attempt to persuade you, dearest Esther, that I did not love Georgiana;—but I now feel that my passion in respect to her was very different from the affection which I entertain for you. Georgiana was the idol of my imagination—you are the mistress of my soul. My attachment to her was wild and passionate—to you it is tender and profound. Dazzled by her splendid beauty, I was bewildered—captivated—held in thralldom: but such a love as that contained not those elements which might render it durable. Your modest and retiring charms, sweet Esther—your amiability—your gentleness—your goodness, all combine to render my love permanent and impossible to undergo diminution or change. Moreover, circumstances which I need not—cannot explain to you, suddenly transpired to alter my sentiments in respect to Lady Hatfield—to make me look upon her as a sister, and never more in any other

light. But if you will give me your love, my Esther, you shall experience all the happiness which can arise from an alliance with one who will make your welfare the study of his life. Indeed, if you still hesitate on the score of those prejudices to which we just now alluded,—then—sooner than resign my hope of possessing this fair hand of your's, I will renounce the society in which I have been accustomed to move—I will dwell with you, when heaven's blessing shall have united us, in some charming seclusion, where we shall be all in all to each other—I will devote myself entirely to you and to that task which I have taken upon myself in respect to the industrious classes—that fine English people, in whom my sympathies are so deeply interested—"

"Oh! my lord," murmured Esther, in a joyous though subdued tone, "how have I merited all the proofs of attachment which you now lavish upon me?—how can the obscure Jewess flatter herself that she is worthy of becoming the bride of one of England's mightiest nobles?"

"Then you *do* consent to become mine, Esther?" cried the handsome young peer; and, reading her answer in her eloquent eyes, he caught her in his arms—he pressed her to his heart—and on her virgin lips he imprinted the first kiss which Esther had ever received from mortal man save her own father.

A few minutes elapsed in profound silence,—a few minutes, during which the happy pair exchanged glances of sincere, and pure, and hallowed love.

Suddenly the sound of footsteps drawing near fell upon their ears: they turned, and beheld Mr. de Medina approaching down the avenue of trees.

Then the Earl of Ellingham, taking Esther's hand, advanced towards the Jew and said in a firm and manly tone, "Mr. de Medina, I am glad that you have come hither at this moment, for I have a great boon to beg of you—a precious gift to solicit!"—and he glanced tenderly towards the blushing maiden who stood by his side.

"I understand you, my dear Arthur," returned Mr. de Medina, smiling. "But I presume that the whole business is already settled and arranged between you," he added, looking slyly and benignantly at his daughter.

"Miss de Medina has consented to bestow her hand upon me, my dear sir," answered the nobleman; "and I scarcely dread a refusal on your part."

"A refusal!" ejaculated Mr. de Medina, the tears of joy and gratitude starting to his eyes: "there is indeed no danger of that! On whom would I consent to bestow my jewel, my pride, if not upon you—you, my dear Arthur, who are all that an Englishman ought to be? Yes—I give you my daughter; and may God ensure your happiness!"

The venerable Jew embraced the Earl and Esther; and the happiness of those three deserving and admirable persons was complete.

The Earl of Ellingham passed the remainder of that day at Finchley Manor; and it was past eleven o'clock in the evening when he alighted from his carriage at the door of his own abode.

On the ensuing morning Clarence Villiers called upon the nobleman, by whom he was most courteously received; and the Earl proceeded to explain to him the nature of the business which had induced him to request the favour of that interview.

"Mr. Villiers," said Arthur, "it will be sufficient for me to inform you that I had reasons for experiencing a more than common interest in behalf of

Thomas Rainford, with whom you were somewhat intimately acquainted. What those precise reasons were, you, as a gentleman, will not enquire: but I believe that you have in your possession a particular letter, which Thomas Rainford entrusted to you; and circumstances now render it necessary that this document should pass from your hands into mine."

"The high character of your lordship commands immediate compliance on my part," said Villiers, producing the letter from his pocket-book and tendering it to the Earl.

"I thank you for this proof of confidence, Mr. Villiers," observed the nobleman: "but to set your mind completely at rest, I can show you a written authorization, signed by Thomas Rainford, to enable me to receive the paper from you."

"It is not at all necessary, my lord," answered Clarence, rising to take his departure.

"One moment," said the Earl, much struck by the frank, candid, and gentlemanly demeanour of Villiers: "any one who felt an interest in Thomas Rainford—especially one in whom he reposed sufficient confidence to entrust with that letter—has a claim on my friendship. I should therefore be delighted to serve you, Mr. Villiers; and let this assurance tend to convince you that I am animated by no idle curiosity in enquiring relative to your position in life. I believe you hold a situation in Somerset House?"

Villiers answered in an affirmative.

"And the salary you at present receive is only ninety or a hundred pounds a-year?" continued the Earl. "You see that Thomas Rainford made me acquainted with your circumstances, and that I have not forgotten them. Indeed, he requested me to exert myself in your behalf; and I am anxious to fulfil his desire. I called at your lodgings in Bridge Street, and learnt that you had been very recently married. Now, ninety or a hundred pounds a-year," continued the Earl, with a smile, "are little enough to enable you to support your changed condition in comfort; and the state of political parties forbids me to ask any favours of the men in power. I will make you a proposal, which you may take time to reflect upon. I require a private secretary: and that post I offer to you. The emoluments are four hundred a-year, and a house rent-free. The dwelling is a beautiful cottage belonging to me, and situate at Brompton. Moreover, I will give you three hundred guineas for your outfit and furniture."

Clarence Villiers was astonished—nay, perfectly astounded by the liberality of this offer; and, unable to utter a word, he gazed upon the Earl with eyes expressive of the most sincere gratitude, mingled with admiration at his generous behaviour.

"I know," resumed the Earl, "that a government situation is a certainty, and that you have every chance of rising in your present sphere: think not, therefore, that I now offer you a precarious employment. No—whether I continue in that activity of political existence on which I have just entered—or whether I be compelled by circumstances to renounce it,—you shall be duly cared for."

"My lord, I accept your generous proposal," exclaimed Clarence, at length recovering the power of speech; "and I shall exert myself unweariedly to deserve your lordship's good opinion of me."

"The bargain is therefore concluded," said the nobleman. "I will give you a note to my solicitor,

who will immediately put you in possession of the lease of the house at Brompton."

The Earl seated himself at a writing-table, and penned the letter to his professional agent: he also wrote a cheque on his bankers for three hundred guineas; and the two documents he handed to Clarence Villiers, who took his leave of the kind-hearted nobleman, his soul overflowing with emotions of gratitude and admiration.

How joyous—oh! how joyous a thing it is to carry glad tidings to the beloved of one's bosom,—to hasten home to a fond, confiding, adoring wife, and be able to exclaim to her, "The smiles with which thou greetest me, dearest, will not be chased away from thy sweet lips by the news which I have in store for thee! For God is good to us, my angel—and happiness, prosperity, and buoyant hopes are ours! From comparative poverty we are suddenly elevated to the possession of affluence; and we enjoy the protection of one who will never desert us, so long as we pursue the paths of rectitude and honour!"

Oh! to be enabled to say this to a loved and loving creature, is happiness ineffable; and that felicity was now experienced by Clarence Villiers, and shared by his charming wife.

Wealth in the hands of such a man as the Earl of Ellingham was like anodynes in the professional knowledge of the physician who attends the poor gratuitously:—the power to do good is the choicest of the unbought luxuries of life, and far more delicious than all the blandishments that gold can procure.

From the midst of a selfish and bloated aristocracy, how resplendently did the Earl of Ellingham stand forth as a glorious example of generosity, manliness, and moral worth! He was the true type of a sterling English gentleman—an Englishman of education, enlightened soul, and liberal sentiments,—not one of those narrow-minded beings, who believe that birth and wealth are the only aristocracy, and whose ideas are limited as the confines of the land to which they belong. Your prejudiced Englishman is a most contemptible character:—borrowing so much as he does from foreign nations—even to the very fashion of his coat and hat, or his wife's gown—he boasts in his absurd and pompous pride, that England is all and every thing in itself. Britain is indeed a wonderful country; but Britain is not the whole world, after all. In all that is useful as far as the solid comforts of life are concerned, she stands at the head of civilisation; but she cannot compete with France in the refinements and elegancies of existence, nor in the progress of purely democratic principles. If Great Britain be a wonderful country, the French are a wonderful—aye, and a mighty and noble nation, likewise; and in France at least the principles of equality are well understood, and the battering ram of two Revolutions has knocked down hereditary peerage—class distinctions—religious intolerance—and that vile *prestige* which makes narrow-minded Englishmen quote the "wisdom of their ancestors" as a reason for perpetuating the most monstrous abuses!

But let us return to the Earl of Ellingham, who, having terminated his interview with Clarence Villiers, repaired to the dwelling of Lady Hatfield.

Georgiana was at home, and Arthur was immediately admitted to the drawing-room where she was seated.

He had not now the same feelings of pleasure which had lately animated him, when entering the presence of one whom he had sought to love as a sister: the scene at Carlton House haunted him like an evil dream;—and as he contemplated the calm and tranquil demeanour of Georgiana, he felt grieved at the idea that beneath this composure must necessarily reign the excitement experienced by a woman who had resolved on becoming the King's mistress.

Nevertheless, in pursuance of the resolutions already established in his mind, he conquered—or rather, concealed his sentiments; and, though a bad hand at any thing resembling duplicity of conduct, he managed to greet her without exhibiting any thing peculiar in his manner.

"I have two important communications to make to you, Georgiana," he said, as he seated himself opposite to her. "The first relates to a delicate subject, which we will dispose of as soon as possible. In a word, I have this morning seen Mr. Villiers; and he has given me this paper."

Lady Hatfield eagerly received the document from the hands of the nobleman, and ran her eyes rapidly over it. Her countenance grew deadly pale, and tears tickled down her cheeks, as she murmured in a tone of subdued anguish, "My God! they were in want—they were starving—that woman and my child—and I——"

Then, stopping suddenly short, she threw herself back upon the sofa, covered her face with her hands, and no longer sought to repress the outpourings of her grief.

The Earl interrupted her not: he understood the nature of those emotions which constituted a subject of self-reproach on the part of the unhappy lady, who was so deeply to be commiserated; and he thought within himself, "She possesses a kind—a feeling heart!"

At length Georgiana broke the long silence which prevailed.

"Yes—there can be no doubt?" she exclaimed: "that boy is my child—and he is now with his father! May heaven bless him!"

"Rest assured that he is with one who will treat him kindly, although some weeks must elapse ere he can learn who the boy really is," observed the Earl of Ellingham. "And now for the second communication which I have to make to you, Georgiana," continued the nobleman, desirous to change the topic as speedily as possible. "I have taken your advice—I have followed your counsel——"

"And Esther de Medina is to become the Countess of Ellingham?" said Lady Hatfield, in a low and mournful tone of voice.

"Esther has consented to be mine," added the Earl; "and her father has expressed his joy and delight at the contemplated alliance."

For a few moments Georgiana turned aside her head, and appeared to struggle violently and painfully with the emotions which filled her bosom.

"Arthur," she said at last, evidently scarcely able to stem the flood of her agitated feelings, "I am happy to learn these tidings. You will be blessed in the possession of one who has been represented to me in such an amiable—such an estimable light. I congratulate you—and her likewise. You deserve all the felicity which this world can give; and she who is destined to be—your bride," added Georgiana

tremulously, "must feel proud of you. Yes, Arthur—your high character—your talents—your generous disposition—your noble nature——"

She could say no more: in summing up all his good qualities, she seemed to be reminded how much she had lost—and she burst into tears.

Arthur was painfully affected: he had not expected such a scene as this!

Was it possible that a woman who, either yielding to the cravings of a voluptuous disposition or dazzled by an ignoble and false ambition, had consented to become the mistress of a King,—was it possible that such a woman could manifest so much true and profound feeling on learning that he whom she had once loved was about to wed another, she herself having counselled the alliance? Was it possible that he was still so dear to her, and that her own generous nature had suggested that union through a conscientious belief that it would result in his happiness, though she herself sacrificed all her tenderest feelings in urging him to adopt a course which must necessarily interfere even with the friendship which had conventionally succeeded their love? He had indeed, in the first instance, fancied that the advice which Georgiana had given him arose from the best and kindest motives, but the scene at Carlton House had made him mistrustful of her. Now, then, all his good opinion of her revived in its pristine strength;—and yet he was bewildered when he thought that one, who was susceptible of such noble conduct, could have become so suddenly depraved as to consent in a single hour to resign all the purity of her soul in homage to the advances of a royal voluptuary.

But Georgiana understood not what was passing in his mind; and she supposed, by his embarrassed manner and air of profound thought, that he felt only for her in regard to the position in which they had been formerly placed.

"Let no thought for me mar your happiness, Arthur—dear Arthur," she said, in a voice of solemn mournfulness. "Believe me, I have your welfare sincerely—deeply at heart—far more than perhaps you imagine," she added, with strange yet unaccountable emphasis. "At the same time, I am but a poor weak woman, and cannot altogether restrain my feelings. I rejoice that you are about to form an alliance with an amiable and beautiful young lady, who is so well deserving of your love: at the same time, my memory—oh! too faithful memory—carries me back to those days—indeed, to only a few months ago, when my hopes were exalted and my prospects of happiness bright indeed. However," she added hastily, "let me not dwell upon that topic—and pardon my momentary weakness, Arthur. May God bless you!"

With these words, Lady Hatfield hurried from the room; and the Earl of Ellingham took his departure, grieved and bewildered by all that had just occurred.

"If Georgiana be really serious in resigning herself to King George the Fourth," thought Arthur, as he returned in his carriage to Pall Mall, "she sacrifices the purity of the most generous—the tenderest—the noblest heart with which woman ever was endowed,—save and excepting my own well-beloved Esther!"

CHAPTER CI.

THE BLACKAMOR'S STRANGE ADVENTURE.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening of the same day on which the above-recorded interview took place between the Earl of Ellingham and Lady Hatfield, that the Blackamoor, clad in a very plain—almost a mean attire, sauntered along Pall Mall West, and stopped for a few moments in front of the nobleman's house.

He gazed wistfully at the windows—murmured something to himself—uttered a sigh—and passed on.

His appearance attracted the notice of two gentlemen who were walking arm-in-arm in the same direction; and, as they examined him more closely by the light of an adjacent lamp, one said to the other, "Since his Majesty has taken it into his head to have a black servant, I really think that the very man to suit the purpose is now before us. He is a well-made, good-looking fellow."

"My dear Warren," said the gentleman thus addressed, "you are positively absurd with your notions that you have only to ask in a King's name in order to have. How do you know that this man wants a situation?"

"He looks as if he did, Harral," replied Sir Phillip Warren. "See—he lounges along as if he had no fixed object in view—his clothes do not appear to be any of the best—and his whole demeanour gives me the idea of a lacquey out of place."

"My dear friend," whispered Sir Randolph Harral—who, like his companion, was one of the King's courtiers, "you are really wrong. That man is something far superior to what you conceive him to be: there is even an air of subdued gentility about him—"

"Pooh! pooh! Harral," interrupted Sir Phillip Warren: "you do not understand these matters so well as I do. At all events there is no harm in questioning that fellow—for I should rejoice to be able to fulfil to-night a whim which our royal master only expressed this afternoon when he saw the French Ambassador's splendid black *chasseur*."

"Well, as you please, Warren," observed Sir Randolph Harral: "but as I do not wish to get myself knocked down for insulting a person of a superior class to what you imagine, I shall leave you to pursue the adventure alone."

This conversation had been carried on so close to the Blackamoor, that, although the two courtiers had spoken in a very low voice, and had not of course intended that their remarks should be overheard, yet scarcely a word had escaped his ears. Affecting, however, all the time to continue his lounging, listless walk, he took no apparent notice of the gentlemen behind him, and even pretended to start with surprise when Sir Phillip Warren—Sir Randolph Harral having re-entered Carlton House—tapped him on the shoulder.

"My good man," said the courtier, in a patronising fashion, "I wish to have a few moments' conversation with you."

"Certainly, sir," exclaimed the Blackamoor, touching his hat just like a lacquey, and assuming the tone and manner of one.

"I thought so—I knew I was right?" exclaimed Sir Phillip, rubbing his hands in proof of his satisfaction; then, attentively scanning the Black from head to foot, by the aid of the lamp at the door of a neighbouring mansion, he said in a less excited tone,

"I suspect you, my good fellow, to be a person in search of employment—"

"Yes—sir," interrupted the Blackamoor, now enjoying the farce that he was playing; "I should very much like to obtain a good situation, and can obtain a first-rate character from my late master."

"The very thing!" cried Sir Phillip Warren, hugely delighted at the opportunity of crowing over his friend Sir Randolph Harral—then, once more addressing himself to the Black, he said, "Now what should you think if I proposed to you to enter the household of his most gracious Majesty?"

"I should be afraid that the offer was too good to be realized, sir," was the answer, delivered in a tone of deep respect; although the Blackamoor was laughing in his sleeve the whole time.

"It all depends upon me, my good fellow," said Sir Phillip: "and if I am satisfied with you, the matter is settled immediately. But we cannot continue to talk in the open street—so follow me to my own apartments in the palace."

Thus speaking, the courtier led the way to Carlton House, the Blackamoor following at a respectful distance, and saying to himself, "What object I propose to myself in embracing this adventure, I know not. It, however, tickles my fancy, and I will go on with it. Besides, having an hour to spare, I may as well divert myself in this way as any other."

Accordingly, he followed Sir Phillip Warren into the royal dwelling; and in strict silence did they proceed, until they reached an ante-room leading to a suite of apartments which were occupied by the old courtier. In that ante-room they stopped; for Sir Phillip was immediately accosted by his valet, who, starting from a seat in which he had been dozing, said, "If you please, sir, his Majesty has sent twice, during the last half-hour, to desire your presence."

"Very good, Gregory," exclaimed Sir Phillip: "I will attend to the royal command this moment; and do you take the present of hot-house fruit at once to my sister, Lady Maltoun. Her ladyship requires it for her grand supper to-night. Tell her that I am enabled to send it through the goodness of my royal master."

"Yes, sir," answered the valet, and instantly took his departure.

"My good fellow," said Sir Phillip Warren, turning towards the Blackamoor, "you perceive that it is impossible for me to speak to you at present. You must sit down and wait patiently until my return. I shall not be very long away, but, in any case, wait!"

Sir Phillip Warren, having issued these injunctions, hastened into the inner apartments to amend his toilette after his evening's stroll; and in a short time he came forth again, with knee-breeches and silk stockings, all ready to attend upon the king. In passing through the ante-chamber he repeated his command that the Black should await his return; and the latter promised to obey.

When left alone, this individual seated himself, and gave way to his reflections, forgetting for a time where he was. At length he started up, looked at his watch, and found that upwards of half-an-hour had elapsed since the old courtier had left him. He was already wearied of waiting; but a natural love of adventure and of the excitement of novelty induced him to remain a little longer to see the issue of the affair which had led him thither. He accordingly whiled away another half hour with

a newspaper which lay on the table; and, that interval having passed, he began to think of taking his departure without farther delay.

Issuing from the ante-room, he proceeded along a well-lighted corridor, from the extremity of which branched off two smaller passages, one to the right, and the other to the left. The Blackamoor was now at a loss which path to pursue, for he could not, for the life of him, remember by which passage the old courtier had led him on his arrival an hour previously.

He was not, however, a man at all capable of hesitating to explore even a royal palace, in order to find a mode of egress, when it did not suit him to wait for the return of his guide: and taking the passage to the right, he hastened on until he reached a pair of colossal folding doors. Perfectly recollecting to have passed through those doors on his arrival—or at all events through folding-doors exactly like them—he pushed them open, and entered a large ante-room, well lighted, and containing four marble statues as large as life.

"Now," thought the Blackamoor, "I am mistaken; for I do not remember to have seen those statues as I followed the old gentleman into the palace just now. And yet I might have passed through this room without noticing them. At all events, I well recollect those large and splendid folding-doors; and so I must be right."

It happened, however, that he was altogether wrong in the path which he had pursued in order to find an egress from the palace; and he was deceived by the fact that at each end of the long passage, from the middle of which the corridor branched off, there were folding-doors of an uniform shape, size, and appearance. But, conceiving himself to be in the right road, he crossed the ante-room, and, pushing open a door at the farther extremity, found himself in a magnificent apartment, the furniture of which was of the French fashion of King Louis the Fifteenth's time. The hangings and drapery were of crimson velvet, of which material the cushions of the chairs and the sofas were also made. Several fine pictures, by old masters, and vast mirrors with elaborately decorated frames, graced the walls; and the whole was displayed by a rich, subdued, golden lustre, diffused throughout the room by lamps, the globes of which were of very thick ground glass. It was a mellow light, sufficient, yet without glare—misty, without being positively dim—and calculated to produce a lulling sensation of voluptuous indolence, rather than to dazzle the eyes with a wakeful brilliancy. In fact, there was altogether something ineffably luxurious in the general appearance of this apartment, which was magnificent without being spacious, and the perfumed atmosphere of which stole like a delicious languor on the senses.

The Blackamoor forgot for a few moments that he was an intruder—or, if he remembered the fact, he was indifferent to it: and, though the instant he entered this apartment he saw that he had indeed taken a wrong path, yet he could not help advancing farther into it to admire its sumptuous elegance and fine pictures. He was thus gratifying his curiosity, when he heard voices in the ante-room through which he had just passed; and, obeying a natural impulse, he slipped behind the rich velvet curtains drawn over the immense window, near which he happened to be standing at the moment.

The door opened, and two persons entered the apartment.

"I will await her here, Warren," said one, in a commanding and triumphant tone: "and see that during our interview, we are secured against interruption of any kind."

"Your Majesty shall be obeyed," answered Sir Phillip. "Have you any farther orders, sire?"

"None, my faithful friend," returned the King. "Stay—have I the document?"

"I gave it to your Majesty ere now, after having myself fetched it from the Home Office," said the courtier.

"True! I have it safe," said George the Fourth. "And now hasten to receive the fair one, Warren: it is past ten o'clock, and I am impatient to behold her charming countenance again."

Sir Phillip departed; and the King, throwing himself upon one of the voluptuous ottomans, exclaimed aloud, "Now for a new pleasure! I know not how it was, but I never before took so sudden and ardent a fancy for any woman, as for this Georgiana Hatfield. There is something truly bewitching—ineffably captivating in her sweet countenance; and the calm repose which characterises the general expression of that face, has for me an influence profoundly voluptuous. Then her bust—oh! her bust—that is charming indeed,—so full—so richly proportioned—and yet evidently so firm! She has never been married, and Warren says that her reputation is untarnished. It will be a luxury of paradise to revel in her virgin charms. And yet, somehow or other, the joys of love are not generally unknown to ladies in the fashionable world who have reached the age of four or five and twenty. No matter! be she virgin or not, she is an adorable woman; and I am madly impatient for her coming."

The King rose from the ottoman, and walked slowly across the apartment, stopping opposite a mirror in which he surveyed himself. His admirably fashioned wig was entirely to his taste: there was not a curl nor a wave which he could have wished otherwise than it was. His false teeth were white, fixed firmly in his mouth, and had a perfectly natural appearance. The tie of his cravat—borrowed from the fashion set by his once all-powerful favourite, Beau Brummell—was unexceptionable. The white waistcoat had not a crease, so perfectly did it fit the portly form of the royal voluptuary. The above-mentioned Beau Brummell could not, even in his ire against the King, have found the shadow of an excuse for a cavil against the black dress-coat, so artistically was it made. No tailor in the famous city of Paris could have achieved a greater triumph in respect to the pantaloons: and as for the polished dress-boots—O immortal Hoby!

Well satisfied with the result of his survey, George the Fourth returned to the ottoman, and relapsed into a train of voluptuous imagings with respect to Lady Hatfield. This current of thought, whereby, in his emasculated old age, he endeavoured to invigorate his physical powers through the medium of an excited and heated imagination, led him to reflect upon all the beauteous women—and their name was Legion—who had ever surrendered themselves to his embraces; and his ideas naturally wandered to the enjoyments, luxuries, and pleasures which his exalted rank and immense resources enabled him to procure. Then he chuckled with



triumphant delight at the egregious folly of the great and powerful English people tolerating a King at all. But he likewise knew that his own conduct and example had done more harm to the cause of monarchy than all the republic pamphlets of democratic disquisitions ever published. He was well aware that, without intending to be so, he was the most effectual means of opening the eyes of the civilized world to the insanity and madness of maintaining monarchical institutions; and though he foresaw that the industrious millions of this realm must inevitably, sooner or later, overthrow monarchy and establish a pure democracy, yet he consoled himself, in his revolting selfishness, with the conviction that "the throne would last during his time, at all events."

It was about half-past ten, when the door opened; and the Blackamoor, peeping from behind the curtains, beheld a lady, closely veiled, enter the room, the door immediately closing behind her.

"Adorable Georgiana!" exclaimed the King, hastening forward to receive her, and then conducting her to a seat: "I am rejoiced that you have thus yielded to my wishes—that you have come to me this evening."

"But wherefore, sire, did you insist upon this No. 48*.—MYSTERIES OF LONDON.

visit?" asked Lady Hatfield, in a low and tremulous tone. "Our compact stipulated that I was first to receive a certain document, as a proof of your Majesty's sincerity —."

"Dearest Georgiana, raise that odious veil—lay aside that invidious bonnet, which conceals your charming countenance!" exclaimed the monarch in an impassioned voice.

"Oh! sire, I have taken a step at which I tremble," said Lady Hatfield, raising her veil, but retaining her bonnet. "On my way through the corridors, guided by Sir Phillip Warren, I met two or three of your Majesty's retainers; and if they recognised me—in spite of the thick veil—"

"Fear not on that account," interrupted the King. "I admit our compact was as you just now stated it to be, and that the paper should have been forwarded to you. But I was so anxious to see you soon again, that I could not resist the temptation of that idea which suggested to me how much better it would be to solicit you to come hither this evening and receive from my hands the document which you so much desire. Here it is, beloved Georgiana—signed by myself, and countersigned by the Secretary of State."

The King presented the paper to Lady Hatfield who

received it with joy flashing from her eyes: and she immediately secured it about her person.

"My curiosity prompts me to ask an explanation of the extraordinary contents of that document," said the monarch; "but on the other hand delicacy forbids."

"And I thank you for this delicacy, sire," exclaimed Lady Hatfield, with earnest sincerity. "It were a long tale to tell—and an useless one—"

"Yes—useless indeed, when we have a far more interesting topic for our discourse," interrupted George the Fourth, throwing one of his arms round the lady's neck.

"Sire!" cried Georgiana, in a reproachful tone, as she hastily withdrew herself from that half-embrace and retreated to the further end of the ottoman.

"Oh! wherefore play the coy and the cruel?" exclaimed the King. "Have I not given you a signal proof of my attachment, by affixing my signature to a paper the contents of which I scarcely understand, and by ordering the Minister to legalize it with his name? And think you, sweet lady that it was an easy task to induce that responsible functionary to obey me in this respect? But I menaced and coaxed by turns; and all this for your sake! Do I not, therefore, deserve the reward of your smiles—the recompense of your caresses?"

"I recognise all that is generous in the conduct of your Majesty towards me in respect to this document," said Lady Hatfield: "but were I to succumb to you now, sire, I should loathe myself—I should become degraded in my own estimation—I should feel that I had been purchased by a bribe! No, sire: I cannot renounce every consideration of purity—every sentiment of propriety, in a single moment."

"What further proof do you require of my attachment?" demanded the King, in a tone of vexation which he could not altogether subdue.

"No other proof, save your forbearance on this occasion," answered Georgiana. "Remember, sire, what I told you the other night: I am not a woman of impure imagination—no—nor of depraved character; and I cannot consent to become your mistress, without a mental effort on my part—without wooing on yours. In yielding myself to your Majesty, it will be as a wife who is forced to dispense with the ceremony which alone can make her one in reality; and if your Majesty deem me worth the winning, let me be won by means of those delicate attentions which would be shown in honourable courtship."

"Perdition!" ejaculated the King, who was as much unaccustomed to hear such language as he was to sne at the feet of beauty: "how long will you keep me in this suspense, fair lady?—how long must I endure the tortures of deferred hope? Consider—I love you madly: you are so beautiful—so sweetly beautiful! Oh! to press you in my arms—"

"Pardon me, sire, for daring to interrupt you," said Georgiana; "but if there be nothing save the impulse of the senses in this *liaison* of ours, your Majesty will soon become wearied of me—and I shrink in horror from the idea of becoming the cast-off mistress of even royalty itself. Let me seek to engage your affections, as you must endeavour to enchain mine; so that our connexion may be based upon the sentiments and feelings of the heart."

"But I already love you sincerely—devotedly, cruel Georgiana!" cried the King, his eyes greedily running over the outlines of the exquisitely proportioned form of the lady, and the rapid survey exciting his desire almost beyond endurance.

"Not with a love calculated to be permanent," said Georgiana, quietly; "and unless I become the object of such an affection, never—never shall I so far forget myself—"

"This is cruel—this is maddening!" exclaimed the King, and he extended his arms towards Lady Hatfield.

"Sire, do not treat me with outrage," she said, rising from the ottoman and speaking in a dignified manner. "If your Majesty supposed that your Sovereign rank would so far dazzle my imagination as to make me throw myself into your arms at the very first words of encouragement that fell from your lips, your Majesty has sadly misunderstood the character of Georgiana Hatfield."

"Be not angry with me, adorable creature!" exclaimed the King: "I love you too much to risk the chance of losing you by any misconduct on my part. Name, therefore, your own terms. Or rather, let me ask whether you will consent to visit me every evening for an hour, and allow us an opportunity to become better acquainted with each other?"

"Now your Majesty speaks in a manner calculated to win my esteem," observed Lady Hatfield, avoiding a direct reply to the question put to her, "and when the esteem of a woman is once secured—"

"I understand you," interrupted George the Fourth, hastily: "her love speedily follows. Be it as you say, sweet lady," he continued in a slower tone; "and let us secure each other's affections. You shall find me docile and obedient to your will—and this is much for me to promise. But let me hope that the period of probation will not be long—that the hour of recompense is not far distant—"

"Hush, sire!" exclaimed Georgiana, in a reproachful voice: "this is the language of sense—whereas you must secure my affections by the language of sentiment. If you treat me as a woman who is to be purchased as your mistress, let our connexion cease this moment: but if you will woo me as a wife should be won—although I am well aware that your Majesty's wife I can never be—"

"Would that I could marry you this moment!" cried the King, fixing his eyes upon her benevolent countenance; "for you are ravishingly lovely! I would give a year of my life to obtain all I crave this night. Oh! Georgiana, be not so coy and cruel with me—for you madden me—my veins seem to run with molten lead. Do mine at once—and render my happiness complete. Behold that small low door in yonder corner: it opens into a room which may serve as our nuptial chamber. Come, then, dearest Georgiana—let me lead you thither—not cold, hesitating, and resisting, but warm and impassioned, and prepared to revel in the delights of love! Our privacy will be complete: no intruder need we fear; and the world will never know that you have become mine."

"Sire, this language on your part—in spite of all the arguments and remonstrances which I have used," exclaimed Lady Hatfield, "is unworthy of a great King and a polished gentleman."

"The madness of love knows nothing of regal rank nor the shackles of etiquette," said the monarch, speaking in a tone of great excitement; "and, in spite of the promises which I just now so rashly made, I cannot endure delay. No—sweet lady—you must be mine at once!"—and he wound his arms around Georgiana's form, and the fury of his desires animating him with a strength against which she could not long have resisted.

But at that moment succour was at hand.

Forth from his place of concealment sprang the Blackamoor; and an ejaculation of surprise and rage burst from the lips of the King, while a cry of joy emanated from those of Lady Hatfield.

"Who are you? and what signifies this intrusion?" demanded George the Fourth, instantly releasing his intended victim at this sudden apparition.

But, without answering the monarch, the Blackamoor hastily led the half-fainting Lady Hatfield to the door—opened it to allow her to pass out of the room—and, closing it behind her, placed his back against it,—the whole being effected with such speed, that Georgiana had disappeared before the King could recover from the astonishment into which the very first step of the bold proceeding had thrown him.

"Villainous negro!" cried the disappointed monarch, at length, recovering the power of speech: "do you know who I am, that you have thus dared to outrage me?"

"I know full well who you are, sire—and I am grieved to the very soul at the idea of being compelled to acknowledge you as my King," returned the Black, in a calm—collected—and somewhat mournful tone.

"This insolence to me!" ejaculated George the Fourth, becoming purple with rage. "Make way, sirrah, for me to pass hence!"

"Not until I have allowed Lady Hatfield sufficient time to escape from this house which the country has given as a palace for your Majesty, but which seems to be used for purposes too vile to contemplate without horror," was the firm reply.

The King fell back a few paces in speechless astonishment. Never before had he been thus bearded:—but in that momentary interval of silence, a crowd of recollections rushed to his mind, warning him that the individual who thus seemed to defy his rank and power, had been present during the whole of the interview with Lady Hatfield,—and that this individual had learnt how the Royal and Ministerial signatures had been given as a means of propitiating a coy beauty, without any reference to the interests of the State:—when the King remembered all this, he was alarmed at the serious manner in which he suddenly found himself compromised. For that Blackamoor could make revelations of a nature to arouse against him the indignation of the whole kingdom; and, reckless as George the Fourth was of public opinion, he trembled at the idea of exciting public resentment.

Thus did a few moments of reflection show him the precipice on which he stood, and carry to his mind a conviction of the necessity of making terms with the sable stranger, who had obtained such a dangerous power over him. But the mere thought of such a compromise was sorely repugnant to the haughty spirit of George the Fourth: and yet there was no alternative! He accordingly addressed himself with the best grace he could assume, to the task of conciliation.

"My good sir," he said, approaching the Black, "I seek not to deal harshly with you: and yet you owe me an explanation of the motives which induced you to penetrate into the palace, and the means by which you gained access to my private apartments."

"I feel bound to answer your Majesty with candour and frankness, in order to clear myself from any injurious suspicion which my concealment in this room might naturally engender," was the reply.

"The explanation, sire, is briefly given:—I was accosted by an elderly gentleman in Pall Mall, and asked if I required a situation. In truth I do not;

but it being intimated to me that the proffered place was in the royal household, curiosity prompted me to follow the gentleman into the palace. He left me alone in his ante-room for upwards of an hour; and, growing weary of waiting, I sought a means of egress. But, losing my way, I found myself at length in this room; and almost immediately afterwards your Majesty entered with the very gentleman I am speaking of, and whose name I learnt to be Warren. I concealed myself behind the curtains—with no bad intention; and indeed I was about to come forth and explain the reasons of my presence to your Majesty, when certain words which fell from your Majesty's lips made me acquainted with the fact that Lady Hatfield was expected here every moment. That name nailed me to the spot—and I was prompted by an uncontrollable curiosity to wait and satisfy myself whether Lady Hatfield could have become so depraved as to surrender herself to your arms."

"You are acquainted with her, then!" exclaimed the King. "And yet," he added, a moment afterwards, "she did not appear to recognize you."

"No, sire—she did not recognise me," returned the Black.

"But you must know her well, since the mere mention of her name rendered you thus anxious to see the issue of our interview?" said the King, impatiently.

"I know her well, sire," was the guarded response; "and yet she knew not me."

"Who are you, then?" demanded George the Fourth, fixing a searching look upon the stranger. "You certainly are not what Sir Philip Warren took you for——"

"I must firmly, though respectfully, decline to give any account of myself," said the Blackamoor. "Your Majesty will now permit me to withdraw."

"One moment," cried the King. "How stand we in respect to each other? Do you constitute yourself the enemy of your sovereign?—will you publish your knowledge of all that has transpired here this evening?—or can I offer you some earnest that I myself am not offended by the manner in which you ere now thought fit to address me?"

"I have no interest in making known to the public those secrets which have so accidentally been revealed to me," answered the Blackamoor. "It is never a pleasing task to an honest man to publish the frailties or failings of a fellow-creature—much less when that fellow-creature is placed at the head of the nation. As for any reward, or rather *bribe*, to induce me to remain silent, none is necessary. At the same time," he added, hastily correcting himself as a second thought struck him, "it may be as well that I should avail myself of your Majesty's offer; for it might so fall out that the privilege of claiming a boon at your royal hands——"

"May prove serviceable to you some day or another—eh?" added the King, impatiently. "Well—be it so; and, stranger though you be to me, I rely in confidence upon your solemn pledge to place a seal on your lips relative to the incidents of this night."

Thus speaking, the monarch seated himself at the nearest table, and opening a drawer, took forth writing materials; then, with a haste which showed his desire to put an end to a painful interview, he penned the following lines on a slip of paper:—

"We acknowledge a sense of deep obligation to the bearer of this memorandum, the said bearer having rendered us especial service, and we hold ourselves bound to grant him any boon which he may demand at our hands,

so that it be not inconsistent with our royal honour, nor prejudicial to the interests of the State.

"Given this 3d of March, in the year 1827.

"GEORGE REX" (L.S.)

The King lighted a taper, and affixed his royal seal to this document, which he then handed to the Blackamoor, saying, "You perceive what confidence I place in you: see that the good name of Lady Hatfield on the one side, and your Sovereign's honour on the other, be not compromised by any indiscreet revelations on your part."

"Your Majesty may rest assured that I shall maintain the incidents of this evening a profound secret, and that I shall not abuse the privilege conferred upon me by this paper which bears your royal signature."

The Blackamoor bowed, and retired from the presence of King George the Fourth, whom he left in no very pleasant humour at the turn which his meditated attack upon the virtue of Lady Hatfield had taken.

On this occasion, the Black had no difficulty in finding the way to the private staircase up which Sir Phillip Warren had originally introduced him; and he was about to issue forth from Carlton House, when he suddenly encountered that old courtier and Sir Randolph Harral in the hall.

These gentlemen were disputing in a loud tone; but the moment the Blackamoor appeared, Sir Phillip Warren sprang towards him, exclaiming, "Why, where have you possibly been? But no matter," he added, in a triumphant tone, "since you are here at length to settle the question between me and my friend."

"The fact is, my good sir," said Sir Randolph, "I have laid Sir Phillip Warren twenty guineas——"

"Yes—twenty guineas," interrupted Sir Phillip hastily, "that you are——"

"That you are *not*——" cried Sir Randolph.

"I say that you are!" exclaimed Sir Phillip.

"And I say that you are *not*!" vociferated Sir Randolph.

"Gentlemen, pray explain yourselves," said the Blackamoor.

"Well—I say that you are a lacquey out of place," observed Sir Phillip Warren.

"And I say that you are *not*," cried Sir Randolph Harral, in his turn; "whereupon we have bet twenty guineas."

"And you must decide who has won," added Sir Phillip.

"Then, gentlemen," said the Blackamoor in a merry tone, "I can soon set the matter at rest. So far from being a lacquey out of place, I have upwards of a dozen dependants of my own. I wish you a very good night."

"Why—I am robbed as if it were on the highway!" exclaimed Sir Phillip Warren, his countenance suddenly becoming as awful and blank as such a portwine visage could possibly be.

"Ha! ha!" chuckled Sir Randolph: "robbed or not—please to hand me over twenty good guineas."

And the cachination of the winning courtier was echoed by the merry laugh of the Blackamoor, as this individual issued forth from Carlton House.

Again, as he passed along Pall Mall, did the Black pause for a few moments opposite the splendid mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, and gaze at it with the attention of no common observer. He was about to continue his way, when two men, belonging to the working class, stopped likewise for an instant in front of the house; and one said to the other, "That is where the Earl lives. God bless him!"

"Yes—God bless him!" repeated his companion,

with the emphasis of unfeigned sincerity: "for he is the people's friend."

The two men then passed on.

"Who dares to say that the industrious millions have no gratitude?" murmured the Blackamoor to himself, as he also pursued his way. "O Arthur! you are now indeed worthy of the proud name which you bear: and I likewise exclaim from the very bottom of my heart, 'May God bless you!'"

CHAPTER CII.

A STATE OF SIEGE.

RETURN we now to Frank Curtis, his excellent wife, and Captain O'Blunderbuss, who were living in a complete state of siege at the house in Baker Street.

The captain was the commandant of the garrison, and superintended all the manoeuvres and the devices which it was necessary to adopt to keep out the enemy. The front door was constantly chained inside; and every time there was a knock or a ring, John the footman reconnoitred from the area. Whenever any one was compelled to go out to order in provisions, the captain stood at the door, armed with the kitchen poker, and looking so grim and terrible that the officers who were prowling about in different disguises, dared not hazard an encounter with the warlike gentleman.

The grocer, the butcher, and the baker lowered their respective commodities down the area by means of a rope and basket provided for the purpose; but they all took very good care to receive the cash first. The milkman and pot-boy were enabled to supply their articles through the opening afforded by the door with the chin up inside; and they likewise strenuously advocated the ready-money principle.

This condition of siege was a source of great delight to Captain O'Blunderbuss. He was completely in his element. Little cared he for the opinion of neighbours: his feelings were by no means concerned. The house, from the first moment he set foot in it, was in a state of perpetual excitement. He was constantly ordering the servants to do something or another: a dozen times a-day did he perform what he called "going his rounds," armed with the poker in case a bailiff should have crept into the place through some unguarded avenue;—and it was indeed with the greatest difficulty that Mrs. Curtis could divert him from a plan which he had conceived and which he declared to be necessary—namely, the drilling of all the inmates of the house, male and female, including the five children, for an hour daily in the yard. As it was, he compelled John, the footman, to mount sentry in the yard aforesaid, every morning while the housemaid was dusting her carpets and so forth—indeed during the whole time that the domestic duties rendered it necessary to have the back-door open. If John remonstrated, the captain would threaten, with terrible oaths, to try him by a court-martial; and once, when the poor fellow respectfully solicited his wages and his discharge, the formidable officer would certainly have inflicted on him the cat-o'-nine-tails, if the cook had not begged him off—she being the footman's sweetheart.

Mrs. Curtis took a great fancy to the captain, and allowed him to do pretty well as he chose. She considered him to be the politest, genteelst, bravest, and most amusing gentleman she had ever known; and it

soon struck her that his various qualifications threw her husband considerably into the shade. Whenever she felt low-spirited, he had a ready remedy for her. If it were in the forenoon, he would exclaim, "Arrah and be Jasus, Mim, it's no wonther ye're dull, with the inimy besaging us in this way: and it's a nice mutton chop and a glass of port-wine that'll be afther sitting ye to rights, Mim." Then forthwith he would ring the bell and order three chops, so that himself and Frank might keep the dear lady company. If it were in the evening that Mrs. Curtis was attacked by those unwelcome visitors termed "blue devils," the captain would recommend "a leetle dhrop of the potheen, brewed afther the fashion in ould Ireland," and while he exhausted all his powers of eloquence in assurances that it should be "as wake as wather, and not too swate," he would mix the respectable lady such a stinger, that her eyes would fill with tears every time she put the glass near her lips. Sometimes he would undertake to amuse the children up in the nuiisery, by going on all fours and allowing them to play at horse-soldiers by riding on his back; and then, what with his shouting and bawling, and their laughing and screaming, it was enough to alarm the whole neighbourhood—and very frequently did.

All these little attentions on the part of the captain either to herself or her children, gave Mrs. Curtis an admirable opinion of him; and he rose rapidly in her favour. His success in obtaining the five hundred pounds from Sir Christopher Blunt was considered by her as sublime a stroke of mingled policy and daring as ever was accomplished; and his tactics in opposing a successful foil to all the stratagems devised by the sheriff's-officer to obtain admission into the dwelling, made her declare more than once that had he commanded the Allied Army at Waterloo, it would have been all up with the French in half-an-hour.

The femaleservants in the house did not altogether admire the position in which they were placed; but they were so dreadfully frightened at the captain, that they never uttered a murmur in his hearing. They moreover had their little consolations; for Sir Christopher's five hundred pounds enabled the besieged to live, as the captain declared, "like fighting-cocks,"—so that the kitchen was as luxuriously supplied with provender as the parlour; and no account was taken of the wine and spirits consumed in the establishment.

We have before hinted that the house was a perfect nuisance in Baker Street. And no wonder, indeed that it should have been so considered; for it seemed to be the main source whence emanated all the frightful noises that could possibly alarm nervous old ladies, or irritate gouty old gentlemen. No sooner did the day dawn, than Captain O'Blunderbuss would fling up the window of his bed-room, which was at the back of the house, with a crashing violence that made people think he was mad: and, thrusting forth his head with a white night-cap upon it, he would roar out—"John! John! to arms!" as lustily as he could bawl. This was not only to save himself the trouble of replying to the footman's chamber to summon him, but also for the purpose of letting the sheriff's-officers, if any were in the neighbourhood, know that he was on the alert. Then John would poke his head out of another window, and answer the captain's call; and a few minutes afterwards the back-door would open and shut with a terrible bang, and John would be seen to sally forth to mount sentry in the yard, with shouldered poker. Then an hour's interval of comparative silence would

prevail, while the captain turned in again to take another nap, but, at length, up would go the window again—out would come the head—and, "John! hot wather!" would roll in awful reverberation throughout the entire neighbourhood.

The confusion and dismay produced by these alarms were terrific; and the neighbours all threatened their landlords to give warning on the next quarter. For it was not only in the morning that the noise prevailed, but throughout the entire day—ay, and the best part of the night also. Sometimes the captain would take it into his head to discharge his pistols in the yard: or else he would have a fencing match with Frank Curtis, the weapons being pokers, which made a hideous clang. Then there were the rows in the nursery, which were truly awful; and, by way of a variety, Captain O'Blunderbuss would occasionally show himself at the drawing-room windows and vociferate the most appalling abuse at any suspicious characters whom he might happen to behold prowling about. The exhibitions frequently collected crowds in front of the house; and the captain would harangue them with as much earnestness as if he were a candidate at a general election. On one of these occasions the parish-beadle made his appearance, and from the pavement remonstrated with the gallant officer, who kept him in parlance until Frank Curtis had time to empty a pitcher of water over the enraged functionary from the front bed-room window.

But the worst part of the whole business consisted in the goings-on at night-time. Just when sedate and quiet people were getting cozily into their first sleep at about eleven o'clock, Mr. Frank Curtis was getting uncommonly drunk; and, though the captain seemed proof against the effects of alcohol, no matter in what quantity imbibed, he nevertheless grew tiebly and quadruply uproarious when under the influence of poteen. Thus, from eleven to twelve the shouts of laughter—the yells of delight—the cries of mirth—and the vociferations of boisterous hilarity, which came from the front parlour, made night perfectly hideous: but no amount of human patience ever possessed by good and forgiving neighbours, could possibly tolerate the din and disturbance which prevailed during the "small hours." Then would the captain and his friend Curtis rush like mad-men into the yard, shouting—roaring—and bawling like demons, so that the residents in the adjacent houses leapt from their beds and threw up their windows in horror and alarm, expecting to find the whole street in a blaze. These performances on the part of Frank and O'Blunderbuss were intended to show the officers that they were upon the alert; and they not only had the desired effect, but accomplished far more—inasmuch as they produced an absolute panic throughout an entire neighbourhood.

Thus it was that Mr. Curtis's abode—lately so serene and quiet in the time of Mrs. Goldberry—became a perfect nuisance and a scandal; and had Bedlam in its very worst days been located there, the noise and alarm could not have been greater.

It will be remembered that the captain's plan when first he took up his residence in Baker Street, was to get Mr. and Mrs. Curtis and the children away on a Sunday night, and sell off all the furniture on the Monday morning. But this scheme was postponed at first for one week—then for another, because the officers kept such a constant look-out, that the captain saw the necessity of standing the siege until the creditors should be completely wearied of paying those disagree-

able spies to watch the premises. This determination was the more ready come to, inasmuch as the five hundred pounds obtained from Sir Christopher Blunt, supplied sinews to carry on the war in grand style.

When the captain paid the second financial visit to the worthy knight with the view to the effecting of a further loan on the assignat which himself and Frank Curtis had resolved to issue, it was not because money was scarce in Baker Street; but simply because the captain admired "the fun of the thing," and also considered it prudent to raise as ample a supply of bullion as possible. The rage which he experienced at his discomfiture on the occasion can be better conceived than described; and, firmly believing that it was Sir Christopher himself who had dealt him from the carriage window the tremendous blow which sent him sprawling on the pavement in a most ignominious manner, he vowed the most deadly vengeance against the new Justice of the Peace. Picking himself up as well as he could—for the gallant gentleman was sorely bruised—he repaired to the nearest public-house, to "cool himself," as he said in his own mind, with a tumbler of the invariable potent; and having reflected upon the insult which he had received, he thought it best not to communicate his dishonour and discomfiture on his return to Baker Street. Accordingly, having returned to "the garrison," into which he effected an easy entry—for no one dared approach the door when it opened to give him egress or ingress—he assured Mr. and Mrs. Curtis that the knight was out of town, and would not be back for a week. However, in a couple of days, the wonderful adventures of Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles burst upon the metropolis like a tempest; and, as the morning newspapers were dewily dropped down the area of the besieged dwelling in Baker Street, the entire report was read aloud by Frank Curtis at the breakfast-table. It therefore being evident that Sir Christopher was not only in town at that moment, but was likewise in London when the captain had called upon him, the gallant gentleman affected to fly into a violent rage, swearing that the knight was denied to him on purpose, and vowing to make him "repent of his un-gentlemanly conduct." O'Blunderbuss did not however, in his heart, mean to do any such thing as call again in Jermyn Street; for he had despaired of inducing the knight, either by threatenings or coaxings, to advance a further supply; and now that the worthy gentleman was a Justice of the Peace, the captain thought it would be somewhat imprudent to visit him for the mere sake of committing an assault and battery. He accordingly invented divers excuses, day after day, for remaining in "the garrison;" and as funds were abundant, no one urged him to undertake another financial mission to Sir Christopher Blunt.

The reader must remember that Messrs. Mac Grab and Progs were very roughly handled by Captain O'Blunderbuss, when they visited the house in Baker Street for the purpose of arresting Mr. Frank Curtis; and, the honour of a sheriff's officer being particularly dear to its possessor, those worthies considered their's to be at stake, unless they fully vindicated it by capturing the aforesaid Mr. Curtis in the long run. They therefore had recourse to all kinds of devices to obtain an entry into the house, being armed not only with a writ against that gentleman's person on behalf of Mr. Beeswing, but also with an execution against the furniture at the instigation of another of Mrs. Curtis's creditors.

The tricks practised by those worthies to obtain an

entry into the besieged domicile, were as varied as they were ludicrous. On one occasion Mr. Progs, dressed for the nonce as a butcher, and carrying a leg of mutton in a tray on his shoulder, hurried up to the door, gave the loud, sharp, single knock peculiar to the trade, and shouted "T-cher!" in the most approved style. But the parlour window was thrown up, and out popped the head of the ferocious O'Blunderbuss, the countenance as red as a turkey-cock, and the mouth vomiting forth a torrent of abuse; so that the discomfited Mr. Progs was compelled to retreat with all the ignominy of a baffled strategist. On another occasion, Mr. Mac Grab, attired as a general postman, rushed along the street, stopped at the door of the besieged house, gave the two clear, rapid strokes with the knocker, and immediately began to look over a bundle of letters with all the feverish haste of the functionary whose semblance he had assumed. But John came forth from the area; and again was the sheriff's-officer's object completely frustrated. Next day, however, two sweeps appeared in the street, as black as if they had never known soap-and-water, and were accustomed to lodge, eat and sleep in chimneys as well as cleanse them; but upon arriving opposite the parlour windows, they beheld the captain and Frank Curtis "taking sights" at them, the two gentlemen having "twigged the traps" without much difficulty. Thus defeated in all their endeavours to accomplish their aims by cunning, Messrs. Mac Grab and Progs worked themselves up to the desperate resolution of using force; and they accordingly took their post at the front door of Curtis's house, with the apparent determination to rush in the first time it should be opened. But when it was opened as far as the chain inside would permit, and they beheld to their horror and dismay, the terrible captain wielding the poker, they exhibited that better part of valour which is denominated *discretion*. At last, however, they could no longer endure the jeerings of their friends exercising the same agreeable and lucrative profession; and, moreover, the attorneys who employed them in the Baker Street affair spoke out pretty plainly about gentlemen bribing bailiffs not to execute writs, and so forth. All these circumstances induced Mr. Mac Grab and his man Progs to hold a counsel of war over two four-pennorths of ruin-and-water; and the result was a determination, that as the various devices and stratagems they had practised to enter the dwelling had failed, and as they feared to carry it by storm, the stronghold must be reduced by a surprise.

It was on the very evening when the Blackamoor experienced so strange an adventure at Caulton House, that the following scene took place in Baker Street.

The clock had struck ten; and supper being disposed of, the whiskey, hot water, glasses, and et ceteras were placed upon the table of which Frank Curtis, his amiable wife, and Captain Blunderbuss were seated—as 'comfortable a trio as you could wish or expect to see, especially under such adverse circumstances.

"John!" vociferated the captain, as the domestic was about to leave the room; "stop a moment, you rogue, and answer me this. Is the area all safe?"

"Yes, sir," was the ready response.

"And the kitchen-windows—and the back-door—and the yard gate—all right, eh—John?"

"All right, captain; I've just been the rounds."

"And all the provisions in the garrison, John?—plenty of potheen?" demanded O'Blunderbuss.

"Plenty, sir. There'll be no more going out again to-night."

"That's a blessing!" exclaimed the gallant captain. "John!"

"Yes—sir."

"Take a glass of whiskey, mate—and slape with the kitchen-poker-r under your pillow, my friend," enjoined the officer. "We must be armed at all pints, be Jusus!"

"I shan't forget, sir," said John: and having tossed off the spint, he quitted the room.

"Now then to make ourselves cozier," observed the captain, drawing his chair a little closer to Mrs. Curtis. "Pray, Mim, how d'ye feel your dear self this evening?—is it in good spirits ye are, Mim?"

"Thank you, captain," returned Mrs. Curtis, "I am quite well—but the least, least thing nervous. This strange kind of life we're leading—"

"Strange, Mim!" ejaculated the captain: "it's glor-i-ous!"

"Glorious, indeed!" cried Frank. "I only wish the Marquis of Shoreditch was here along with us—how he would enjoy himself."

"You will permit me, Mim!" said the captain, grasping the bottle of whiskey, and addressing the lady in an insinuating manner.

"Now, really, captain—if I must take a very *lertle* drop—" began Mrs. Curtis, with a simper.

"Well, my dear madam, it shall be the lectlost drop in the wor-ld, and so wake that a baby of a month old might drink it and never so much thup up as it walked across the room," exclaimed O'Blunderbuss, whose knowledge of the physical capacities of infants was evidently somewhat vague and limited. "There, Mim!" he added, placing before the lady a large tumbler, the contents of which were equal portions of spirit and water. "you may tell me that I'm a Dutchman and unwor-thy of ould Ire-land if that isn't the puttiest drink iver brewed for one of the fair six."

"You're very kind, captain," said Mrs. Curtis, in a mincing—simpering manner.

"It's you that's kind to say so, Mim," remarked the captain, placing his foot close to that of the lady, and ascertaining by the readiness with which she returned the pedal pressure, that the tender intimation he wished thereby to convey was by no means unwelcome.

Frank did not of course notice what was going on under the table, and the conversation progressed in the usual manner—the captain and Frank vying with each other in telling the most monstrous lies, and the silent interchange of love's tokens continuing with increasing warmth between the gallant gentleman and the stout lady. Mrs. Curtis's spirits, however, seemed to require a more than ordinary amount of stimulant on this occasion; she declared herself to be "very low," although she contrived to laugh a great deal at the captain's lively sallies and marvellous stories;—but as the clock struck midnight and she rose to retire to her chamber, she found that the three glasses of toddy which she had been persuaded to imbibe, had somewhat unsettled the gravity or her equilibrium. The captain sprang from his seat to open the parlour-door for her; and as he bade her "good night," she pressed his hand with a degree of tenderness which, as novel-writers say, spoke volumes.

"Curthius, my friend," said the captain, as he returned to his seat, "be the holy poker-r! you possess a rare jewel of a wife. She's the most amiable lady I ever knew and takes her potheen without any nonsense. Be Jove! she's an ornaiment in a jittle-

man's household; and we'll drink her health in a bumper!"

"With all my heart," exclaimed Frank, already more than half-reas over. "But, I say, captain—do you know that I am getting very tired of the life we're leading? I wish we could put an end to it somehow or another."

"Be the power-rs! and that's the very thing I was going to recommend to ye, Frank!" cried the captain, who was more affected by liquor on this particular night than ever he had been before since the first moment he had taken up his abode in Baker Street.

"But—how can it be done?" hiccupped Curtis.

"Is it how the thing's to be done!" cried O'Blunderbuss. "Can't ye, now, bolt off to France to-morrow night, and leave me in charge of the house? I'll manage to sell ever stick to a broker; and then it's myself that'll bring over the wife, the children, and the money to ye as safe as if they were all my own!"

"I do not like the idea of going away alone, captain," observed Frank, as he refilled his tumbler. "But suppose we talk the matter over to-morrow—when we've slept off the effects of the toddy!"

"Be Jusus! the toddy has no effects upon me!" exclaimed O'Blunderbuss, who nevertheless sat very unsteadily in his chair, his body swaying to and fro in spite of all his efforts to the contrary.

The conversation now languished; but the drinking was maintained, until Frank Curtis suddenly fell from his seat in a vain attempt which he made to reach the whiskey-bottle. The captain burst out into a roar of laughter, and while endeavouring to pick up his companion, rolled completely over him. He however managed, by means of many desperate efforts, to place the young gentleman upon the sofa, where he left him to repose in peace; and, taking up a candle, he staggered out of the room, muttering to himself, "Be the power-rs! if I didn't know—hic—that it was impos-sible—hic—I should say that I—hic—was—drunk!"

This was a conclusion which the captain was by no means willing to admit; and, in order to convince himself that he was perfectly sober and knew what he was about, he proceeded to examine the front-door according to his invariable custom ere retiring to rest.

"Well, be the power-rs!" he murmured, as he stood contemplating the door with all the vacancy of inebriation, "it's John that's a clever fellow—hic—after all—hic! Be Jusus! and it's two chains he's put up—and two bolts at the top—hic—and two bolts at the bottom—hic—and, be the holy poker-r!" exclaimed the captain aloud, his face expanding with an expression of stupid joy; "the house is safe enough—hic—for there's two doors!"

Supremely happy at having made this discovery, and moreover fancying himself to be lighted by two candles—in a word, seeing double in every respect,—the gallant officer staggered along the passage, and commenced the ascent of the stair-case, which appeared to have become wondrously sleep, rickety, and uneven. Stumbling at every step, and muttering awful imprecations against the "thundering fool of a carpenter that had built such a devil of a lath-er," Captain O'Blunderbuss contrived to reach the first landing in safety; but, his foot tripping over the carpet, he fell flat down, extinguishing the light of the candle, though at the same time giving his head such a knock against the balustrades, that a million meteoric sparks flashed across his visual organs.

"Blood and hounds!" growled the gallant gentleman; "there must either be an earthquake—hic—or

else, be the power-rs! I'm—hic—rally—hic—dhrunk!"

Picking himself up, the captain groped about for the stair-case; and, finding it with some little trouble, he continued his ascent in a pleasing state of uncertainty as to whether he were walking on his head or his feet, but with the deeply settled conviction that he was spinning round at a most terrific rate.

"Captham O'Bluntherbuss," he said, apostrophising himself, as he staggered along, "is this rally you or another person? If it's yourself it is—hic—I—I'm ashamed of ye, be the holy poke-r-r; and I've a precious good mind—hic—to give ye a dacent dhubbing, Captain—hic—O'—hic—Bluntherbuss."

Thus soliloquising, the martial gentleman reached the second landing; but here he paused for a few minutes in a state of awful doubt as to which way he should turn in order to reach his own room. He knew that his door must be somewhere close at hand; though whether to the right or to the left, he could not for the life of him remember. At length he began to grope about at a venture, and, having encountered the handle of a door, he hesitated no longer, but entered the chamber with which the said door communicated.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE SURPRISE—A CHANGE OF SCENE.

It was about half past three o'clock in the morning, and profound silence reigned in Baker Street, when four men, bearing a ladder upon their shoulders, passed like phantoms through the obscurity of the thoroughfare, and halted in front of Mr. Curtis's house; where their operations, so far from being at all ghost-like, assumed very much the appearance of those proceedings which are carried on by creatures of flesh and blood.

Thieves, however, they were not. but sheriff's-officers they were,—being our old friends Mac Grab and Progg, assisted by two other queer-looking fellows of the species which chiefly abounds in the tap-rooms and parlours of public-houses in Chancery Lane.

Mr. Mac Grab having satisfied himself by a close scrutiny of the number on the front door, that they had pitched upon the right house, the ladder was forthwith placed against the little iron railing forming the balcony at the drawing-room window: and Mr. Progg was ordered to mount first. But Mr. Progg having perhaps recently studied some book upon etiquette, would not think of preceding his master; and Mr. Mac Grab was doubtless too meek a man to take upon himself the post of honour. As for the two underlings, they very bluntly assumed Mr. Mac Grab that they would see him unpleasantly condemned before they would venture first; and thus the entire project was threatened with discomfiture, when Progg, overcoming his fears, consented to lead the way.

Up the ladder did this hero accordingly drag himself; and had he lost his life in the desperate deed, the epic muse would have been compelled to deplore the death of the last of the famous house of Progg. But fortune beamed upon Progg, though the moon did not; and he reached the balcony in safety. Mac Grab ascended next—and the two subordinates followed,—by which time the intrepid Progg had obtained admission into the house by the simple process of cutting out a pane with a glazier's diamond,

and thrusting in his hand to undo the fastening of the window.

And now, behold the four men safe in the drawing-room—in actual possession of the place,—four heroes who had just carried a strongly fortified castle—by surprise!

A lantern, which Mr. Progg took from his pocket, was lighted; and a flask of rum, which Mr. Mac Grab took from his pocket, was drunk. The heroes then stole gently from the apartment—descended the stairs—opened the front door—and laid down the ladder along the area railings, so that the watchman, on going his rounds, might not raise an alarm of "thieves." This being accomplished, they re-entered the house, and fastened the street-door, the key of which Mr. Mac Grab secured about his own person.

The officers next entered the parlour on the ground floor, where they found Frank Curtis lying asleep upon the sofa.

"That's our chap," said Mac Grab in a tone of deep satisfaction, as he threw the light of his lantern full upon the young gentleman's countenance. "I shall take him off at once, with one of the men; and you, Progg, will remain in possession along with t'other."

"Two on us isn't enow to keep possession agin that devil of an Irishman," exclaimed Progg, bluntly; and the loudness with which he spoke disturbed Mr. Curtis.

Starting up, Frank rubbed his eyes—then stared around him with the stupid vacancy of one who had only half slept off the fumes of whiskey—and at last, as the truth gradually glimmered upon him, he said in a hoarse, thick tone, "Well—who the devil are all you fellows?"

"You'll know soon enow who we be," growled Mac Grab. "Come, get up, young genelman; and don't sit there a-staring at us, as if you was a stuck pig and we was ghostesses."

"So, you've got in at last, have you, old fellow?" said Frank, with an awful yawn. "But I feel precious seedy though. Can't you let me sleep a little longer?"

"You won't sleep no more till you gets to Chancery Lane," returned Mac Grab; "and then you can turn in if you like."

"What o'clock is it?" demanded Frank, his teeth chattering and his whole frame shivering alike with the cold and the unpleasant position to which he had been awakened.

"It's getting on for a quarter to four, or thereabouts," said Mac Grab, consulting a huge silver watch of the turnip species.

"Then I must have been asleep here for some time," mused Frank aloud, and glancing at the table, he added, "Oh! I remember—I was precious drunk last night—"

"Well, I'm blest if I didn't think you was," said Progg, expressing his opinion with more bluntness than politeness. "You'll find a many lusing cove over in Spike Island."

"Spike Island?" ejaculated Frank: then as a light broke in upon him through the mists and fumes of whiskey, he added, "Oh! I understand—the Bench, eh? Well, never say die, my boys; as my friend the Crown Prince of Holland used to observe. If it must be the Bench, it must; but you'll let me tell my wife what's happened."

"We won't let you rouse that Irishman, young gentleman," said Mac Grab. "Let us get you safe off, and then he may wake up, and be damned to him."

"I pledge you my word I will not attempt to rouse



the Captain," exclaimed Curtis: "but I must speak to my wife."

"Well, that's only fair and reasonable," said Mac Grab; "although you don't deserve no good treatment at our hands, seeing how we was served by that awdacious Irish friend of yours. Howsomer. you shall speak to your good lady; but mind, I ain't going to lose sight on you."

"You can come with me as far as the bed-chamber door," observed Frank; "and I shan't keep you many minutes."

"Progs, you'll come along with me," said Mac Grab. "And now, mind, Mr. Curtis, what you're up to. We've got pistols with us; and blowed if we don't use 'em in self-defence, if that Irish friend of your's happens to wake up and tries it on again with any of his nonsense."

"It wasn't my fault that he acted as he did the last time you was here," returned Frank. "But come along, you two—if you must go with me."

Curtis lighted a candle, and led the way gently up stairs, Mac Grab and Progs following close at his heels. They reached the second landing, where Frank stopped at a door, which he was about to open, when the first-mentioned officer said in a low tone,

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"Now, mind—no nonsense!—we won't be done a second time, remember."

"I assure you this is my wife's room," returned Curtis, also speaking in a whisper; and he entered the chamber, the two bailiffs remaining at the door, which was left ajar.

Frank, carrying the light in his hand, approached the bed, and was just on the point of saying, "My dear—my dear!"—when he stopped short—aghast—stupefied—his mouth wide open—and every faculty which he possessed, save that of sight, entirely suspended.

For there—by the side of his wife—lay Captain O'Blunderbuss!

Both were fast asleep; and the countenance of the gallant officer seemed absolutely on fire, so red was it in contrast with the white pillow.

"By Jove—this is too bad!" exclaimed Curtis, at length recovering the powers of speech and movement; and, influenced only by the sudden rage which took possession of him, and which rendered him bold and courageous for the instant, he seized a water-jug from the washing-stand and dashed the contents completely over Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Blood and thunder!" roared the man of war

starting up in a towering passion;—and, springing from the bed, he was about to inflict summary chastisement on his friend, when a shriek issued from the couch—and the captain, stopping short and looking around him, ascertained where he was. The cause of Frank's conduct towards him was instantly apparent; and, subduing his anger, he exclaimed, "Be Jases! and it was all a mistake, me boy! I dhrank too much of the potheen—"

"The Irishman, by goles!" growled a hoarse voice in the landing outside.

"Well—never mind, Progg!" cried another voice: "if he touches us, we'll fire. Rolloa! you fellows down there—come up!—come up!" roared Mac Grab.

And now the whole house was in confusion.

Mrs. Curtis lay screaming and shrieking in bed—the captain rushed upon the landing, with nothing on save his shirt, and looking as if he had just sprung out of a water-butt—Curtis followed, sulky and not half satisfied with the apology he had received relative to the presence of the officer in his wife's chamber—the two men who had been left down stairs were running up as hard as they could—and the servants were calling from the garrets to know what was the matter, but rather suspecting something very much like the real truth in respect to the invasion of the bailiffs.

"Down—down with ye, wild bastes that ye are!" vociferated the captain, as the light which Curtis still carried showed the gallant officer the well known faces of Mac Grab and Progg.

But the two men, who had worked their courage up to the sticking point, produced each a heavy horse-pistol; at the appearance of which formidable weapons the captain hung back, and Curtis shouted out in alarm, "No violence! I'll keep my word and go off with you quiet enough."

"Be Jases! and you shan't though, my dear frind!" cried O'Blunderbuss, looking rapidly round in search of some object which he might use as an offensive weapon against the invaders; but the two men from down stairs now made their appearance, and Curtis put an end to all further hospitalities by surrendering himself to them without any more ado.

"Frank! Frank!" shrieked his wife from the bedroom.

"Curtis, my friend—don't be a fool!" roared the captain: "we'll bate 'em yet!"

The young gentleman, however, took no notice either of his wife's appeal or his friend's adjuration, and rapidly descended the stairs, followed by the sheriff's-officers. He was not only afraid of the pistols; but he was likewise too much annoyed at the bed-chamber scene to care about remaining in the house any longer. Not having courage enough to resent the wrong which he conceived to have been done him, he was nevertheless unable to endure it passively; and he resigned himself, moodily and sulkily, to the lot which circumstances had shaped for him.

Mac Grab and one of the subordinates accordingly departed with their prisoner to the spunging-house in Chancery Lane; while Progg and the other man remained in possession of the dwelling in Baker Street.

It was about half-past four o'clock on that dark and chilly morning, when Frank Curtis entered the lock-up establishment owned by Mr. Mac Grab, the sheriff's-officer. A racking head-ache, the result of the preceding night's debauch—a cold nervousness,

amounting almost to a continuous shiver,—and thoughts of by no means a pleasant nature, all combined to depress the young man's spirits to a very painful degree; and, as the door of the spunging-house closed behind him, he murmured to himself, "Oh! what a fool I have been!" Fortunately, he had plenty of ready money in his pocket; and, putting a guinea into Mac Grab's hand, he said, "Let me have a private room; and have a fire lighted directly."

"Please to sit down for a few minutes in the office here," observed the bailiff, pocketing the coin, "while I call up the servant."

In the meantime the subordidate had lighted a lamp in the little, dirty, cold-looking place, dignified by the name of "the office;" and while Mac Grab went to summon the domestic, Curtis, who was a prey to that fidgetty sensation which seems the forerunner of something dreadful, endeavoured to divert his thoughts from gloomy topics by scrutinizing the objects around him.

A sooty desk, much hacked about with a pen-knife and stained all over with ink—a small shelf containing a few old law books—a law-almanack with thick black lines in the calendar denoting Term-times—a list of the sheriffs and undersheriffs of England and Wales—printed pages showing the arrangements of the Courts for the sittings in and after Term—two or three crazy chairs—and a Dutch clock, which ticked with a monotonous calculated to drive a nervous person out of his senses,—these were the objects which met his view. Every thing appeared musty and worm-eaten;—the office looked as if never were swept out;—and there was an earthly smell of a peculiarly unpleasant nature.

In this miserable place—so cold and cheerless—Frank Curtis was kept waiting for nearly half-an-hour; while the man who remained with him sat dozing in a chair, and every now and then awaking with a sudden dive down and bob up of the head which painfully augmented the nervousness of the prisoner. At last Mr. Mac Grab returned, smelling very strong of rum, and followed by a dirty-looking old woman, who seemed to have huddled on her clothes any-how, and to be in a particularly ill-humour at being disturbed so early in the morning.

"Now then," she said, in a short, sulky tone, addressing herself to Curtis, without however looking at him: "this way."

Frank followed her into a short passage, and then up a narrow stair-case, the miserable candle which she held in one hand and shaded with the other on account of the draught, affording only just sufficient light to render apparent the cheerless aspect of the premises. It was not that there was any thing mean or poor in the interior of the dwelling, the office excepted: but there was an air of deep gloom, and also of dirt and neglect, which struck even so superficial an observer as Mr. Frank Curtis.

The old woman led the way into a moderate-sized front room on the second floor, where she lighted two candles, and then set to work to persuade a few damp sticks smothered with small coal to burn up in the grate. The apartment was fitted up as a sitting-room, but had a bed in it. The walls were hung with numerous pictures, the frames of which were an inch thick in dust and cobwebs; and there was a side-board covered with old-fashioned cut glass. The carpet was worn out in many places, and was

also much soiled with grease and beer; the table-cover was likewise stained with liquor and spotted with ink. The curtains, which were of good material, were completely disguised in dust; and the windows were so dirty that at mid-day they formed a pleasantly subdued medium for the sun-light. Altogether, there was an air of expense mingled with the most cheerless discomfort—an appearance of liberal outlay altogether neutralized by neglect and habits of wanton slovenliness.

The fire burnt feebly—the old woman slunk sulkily away—and Frank Curtis threw himself upon the bed. He was thoroughly wretched, and would have given all the money he had left in his pocket for a few hours' tranquil repose. But sleep would not visit his eyes; and, after tossing about for some time in painful restlessness, he got up as the clock struck eight.

His burning, feverish countenance craved the contact of cold water; and the idea of a refreshing toilette rendered him almost cheerful. But the jug was empty; and there were no towels. He rang the bell: five minutes elapsed—and no one came. He rang again; and at last, another five minutes having gone tediously by, the old woman made her appearance. His wishes were expressed; and the haridan took away the jug. A third interval of five minutes passed, ere she returned. Then she had forgotten the towels; and now a quarter of an hour dragged its slow length along before she came back, bringing with her a miserably thin rag of about a foot square. She was about to leave the room again, when Curtis discovered that there was no soap; and ten minutes more were required for the provoking old wretch to produce a small sample of that very necessary article. Yet for all this *discomfort*, the prisoner had paid a guinea in advance!

"Pray let me have some breakfast as soon as you can, my good woman," said Frank, humiliated and miserable.

"As soon as the kittle boils down stairs," answered the servant, in a surly tone, as she turned to leave the room.

"And how long will that be?" demanded Curtis.

"Don't know; the kitchen fire ain't alight yet;"—and she hobbled away.

In a fit of desperation the prisoner addressed himself to his toilette: but the feeling of utter discomfort still clung to him. The water seemed thick and clammy, instead of cool and refreshing; and the towel was so small that it became saturated in a few moments, and he was compelled to dry his face with a corner of one of the sheets. Having no nail brush, he could not cleanse his hands properly, and the want of a comb left his hair matted and disordered. In fact, he positively felt more uncomfortable and dirty after his ablutions than he did before he began them; and that disagreeable sensation kept him dispirited and wretched.

He walked about the room, examining all the pictures one after the other, until he became as thoroughly acquainted with their subjects as if he had lived for years in that room. He then posted himself at one of the windows, and watched the people passing up and down the street. It was now nine o'clock, and the law-clerks were proceeding to their respective offices. Seedy-looking men were hurrying along with mysterious ships of paper in their hands; and now and then a better-attired person, in a suit of black, would be seen wending his way towards the Chancery Court, carrying the blue bag of his master, a

barrister. Small parties of three or fours would likewise pass up the lane, according to the initiated the irresistible idea—which was also the true one—of tipstaves conducting insolvents to the court in Portugal Street.

At the public house, opposite the barred window from which Curtis was gazing, a small knot of very shabby men had collected, and it required but little knowledge of the specimens of animated nature in Chancery Lane, to recognise their especial calling. In fact they were individuals who belonged to the outworks of the strong entrenchments of the law,—process-servers, sheriff's-officers' assistants, and men who hired themselves out to be left in possession at dwellings where executions were levied. When not actually engaged, they regularly haunted the public-houses, of which they seemed the very door-posts, and if they stepped inside to take something, which was very often indeed, they appeared on intimate terms with the landlord, said "Miss" to the bar-girl, and called the waiter by his Christian name. They had a dirty, seedy, mean, and cringing look about them; and yet, if not adequately recompensed by the unfortunate victims of the law with whom they had to deal, they would become doggedly insolent and grossly abusive.

Half-an-hour passed away; and Chancery Lane grew more attractive. A few barristers, in all the imposing dignity of the black gown and the awful wisdom of the wig, were seen moving along to the Rolls' Court: well-dressed attorneys alighted from their gigs, cabs, or phaetons at the doors of their offices;—and attired clerks, having thrown away their cigars when within view of the windows of their places of business, made up for lost time by cutting briskly over the pavement, flourishing short sticks, and complacently surveying their polished boots, tight fitting trousers, and flash waistcoats.

Frank Curtis sighed as he beheld so many, many persons in the enjoyment of freedom:—but his mournful reverie was at length broken by the entrance of the old woman with the breakfast-tray. His throat was parched, and he had been unable to drink the water; he now, therefore, eagerly applied himself to the tea. But it was wretched stuff; and even extreme thirst could not render it palatable. He tried to eat a piece of toast; but the butter was so rank that his heart heaved against it. He broke open an egg: it however tasted of straw, and nearly made him sick.

Having forced himself to swallow a couple of cups of tea, Frank rang the bell and ordered the woman to bring him a sheet of paper. This command was complied with, after a long delay; and, by the aid of a worn down stump of a pen and ink which flowed like soot and water, Frank managed to pen a brief note to a lawyer whom he knew, and who dwelt in Carey Street hard by. After a great deal of trouble, a messenger was found, who, for the moderate reward of eighteen pence, undertook to convey the note to its place of destination—just fifty yards distant; and in the course of half an hour, Mr. Pepperton, the legal limb alluded to, made his appearance in the shape of a short, thin, sallow-faced man, with small piercing eyes, and very compressed lips.

"Well, Mr. Curtis," said the lawyer, as he entered the room; "got into a mess—eh?"

"Rather so," replied the young man. "But I don't care so much about that, as on account of being locked up in this cursed place. The fact is

I must go over to the Bench; and I dare say Sir Christopher won't let me lie very long there."

"You require a *habeas*, you know," observed the lawyer. "But are you sure that you're sued in the Court of Queen's Bench? because, if it is in the Common Pleas or Exchequer, you will have to go to the Fleet."

"The devil!" ejaculated Frank. "But here's a paper which Mac Grab gave me—"

"Ah! that's right," said Mr. Pepperton, examining the document placed in his hands. "Yes—it's in the Bench safe enough. Holloa!" he exclaimed suddenly, after a few moments' silence: "here's an error in the description. Your name is Francis, and not Frank."

"Jut so!" cried the prisoner, his heart fluttering with the vague hope which his legal adviser's words and manner had encouraged.

"Well—I think—mind, I think that it is highly probable we may set the captain aside," continued Pepperton. "At all events it would be worth the trying. But I must apply to the Judge in Chambers this afternoon; and if we do happen to fail—mind, I say if we do—why, then you can pass over to the Bench to-morrow."

Somewhat or another, persons locked up in spinning-houses always feel confident of getting out on the slightest legal quibble that their ingenious attorneys may suggest. They do not apprehend the chance of failure, and of disbursing two or three guineas, which they can so ill afford, for nothing: the process of applying to a Judge in Chambers seems so certain of a triumphant issue, and there is such a spell in the bare idea, that the door of freedom appears already opening to the touch.

Frank Curtis was not an exception to the general rule which we have mentioned; and he forthwith desired Mr. Pepperton to adopt the necessary steps, although this gentleman assured him that nothing could be done until the after part of the day.

Poor, deluded captive! Little did he think Mr. Pepperton was well aware beforehand that there was not the shadow of the ghost of a chance of success, but that his only motive in suggesting these proceedings was to make as much out of his client as possible.

When Pepperton had left the room, Frank Curtis began to pace it as if he were a Wandering Jew confined to a very miniature world; and he examined the pictures over and over again, until they seemed the most familiar friends of the kind he had ever known. Then he returned to the window, and beheld Mr. Mac Grab and one of his men just starting in a queer-looking gig upon a suburban expedition; and having watched the equipage until it was no longer visible, he bethought himself of asking for a newspaper. He accordingly rang the bell, and intimated his wishes to the old woman, who, after keeping him in suspense as usual for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, returned with a *Weekly Dispatch* a fortnight old and a *Times* of ten days back. Curtis could scarcely control his indignation; and, tossing a shilling to the harriidan he desired her to send out and buy him a morning paper. She departed accordingly, and in half-an-hour returned with that day's *Times*, whereby Mr. Frank Curtis was enabled to divert himself until two o'clock, when he partook of an execrable chop nearly raw, a potato that seemed as if it were iced, and a pint of wine which appeared to have been warmed.

Then how heavily, heavily did the weary hours pass away; and Curtis more than half regretted that his friend O'Blunderbuss did not call upon him. He felt that for the pleasure of his society, he would overlook and forget the treatment he had received at his hands. But the gallant officer came not; and, what with another examination of the pictures, a complete spell of the advertisements (the news being already disposed of) in the *Times*, and a cigar or two, Frank managed to dispose of the time, though miserably enough, until five o'clock.

Mr. Pepperton then came back; and Frank awaited the report in excruciating suspense.

"Well, my dear fellow," said the lawyer, flinging himself in a chair as if regularly worn out by hard work, "we have lost the point; but we have this consolation—"

"What?" demanded Curtis, in the anxious hope of seeing another loophole promising emancipation.

"Why—that we as nearly gained it as possible," returned Pepperton. "It was old Justice Fozzlehem that was at Chambers to-day; and when I argued the point, he rubbed his nose with the feather-end of the pen—he always does that when the thing is very ticklish—"

"Damn Judge Fozzlehem!" emphatically cried Mr. Frank Curtis. "A miss is as good as a mile; and that was what the Prince of Malabar said when my bullet whistled close by his ear at that duel which him and me fought at Boulogne three years ago. But, to speak seriously of business—I suppose that there's nothing left for me to do—"

"But to pay the debt or go to the Bench," added the lawyer, putting the alternatives in as nut-shell a compass as possible.

"Well—the Bench it must be, then!" ejaculated Frank.

"I will take out the *habeas* to-morrow," observed Mr. Pepperton; "and at about five o'clock in the afternoon the tipstaff will be at Serjeant's Inn waiting for you—or may be, you'll have to go over to him at the public-house opposite."

Curtis invited the lawyer to pass the evening with him: but Mr. Pepperton was engaged elsewhere; and the prisoner was therefore compelled to drink and smoke in solitude, occasionally varying the occupation by another spell at the *Times*—another long gaze of envy from the window—and another scrutiny of the pictures.

At last, when ten o'clock struck, Mr. Curtis was thoroughly worn out by feverish excitement, suspense, and annoyances of all kinds; and he retired to rest with the fervent hope of enjoying an uninterrupted slumber till morning. But scarcely had he begun to get drowsy, when a tickling sensation commenced in a thousand parts of his body and limbs; and, to his dismay, he found himself assailed by a perfect legion of those abominable little torturers termed bugs.

Now, Mr. Curtis was most peculiarly sensitive in this respect; and if there were ever a flea or a bug in a bed, it was certain to find him out—aye, and feast upon him too. But never, in the whole course of his life had he experienced such an attack as on the present occasion: never till now had he known bugs so numerous, nor bites so pungent.

At length he jumped up in a rage and agony, and lighted a candle. But vain was all search: not a bug could he find. The legion appeared to have suddenly disappeared. Like Destiny, they were

always to be felt, but never seen. He could not sleep with a light in the room; so, having extinguished it, he laid himself down once more.

For a few minutes he was suffered to remain quiet enough; but at last, back came his tormentors by slow degrees; and scarcely had he torn the skin off one part of his body, than he was compelled to flay another. In this manner hour after hour passed; and, when he did at length fall asleep between one and two in the morning, he was pursued by a legion of bugs and sheriff's-officers in his dreams.

CHAPTER CIV.

THE VISIT.—THE HABEAS CORPUS.

FRANK awoke at seven o'clock, depressed in spirits and unrefreshed in body. His head still ached; and he was sore all over through having nearly torn himself to pieces on account of the bugs. His face betrayed marks of the ravages committed upon him by his little tormentors; and his eyes were swollen from the same cause. He had not even the comfort of copious ablutions; for the process of the toilette was not more satisfactory on this occasion than it had been on the previous day. Thus all circumstances conspired to make him wretched.

Before he sat down to breakfast, he despatched a messenger to Baker Street for a few necessaries which he required; and, as he did not choose to write to his wife, and knew not whether O'Blunderbuss might still be there, he sent a verbal intimation of his wishes.

The breakfast of this morning was no improvement on its predecessor; indeed, it struck Curtis that he had got from bad to worse by trying the desperate experiment of ordering coffee instead of tea. He, however, knew that it was useless to grumble; and so, having disposed of the meal as best he could, he sent for the morning paper, with which he whiled away an hour and a half until the return of his messenger, who came laden with a portmanteau.

"Well, who did you see in Baker Street?" demanded Frank.

"Please, sir, I see Mr. Progg and t'other man which is in possession," was the answer.

"And who else?" enquired Curtis.

"Please, sir, I see a stout lady as give me a glass of gin, and a tall genelman as give me a rap over the head," returned the man.

"And what did he do that for?" cried Frank, laughing in spite of himself.

"'Cos he said, sir, that I did n't speak in a speckful way to him. But here's a note as the genelman give me to give to you, sir."

Curtis tore open a curiously folded letter which the messenger handed to him, and the contents of which ran as follow:—

"Be Jasus, my frind, and it's myself that has a right to complain of unfriendly treatment. Here have I been waiting to resave a bit of a note from ye, and divil a line or a word at all, at all. Your poor wife's distracted and has lost her appetite, and all because of your injurious suspicions; but I do all I can to console her. If you come to reflect upon the matter, Frank, ye must admit that though appayances was against me, yet it is n't Captham O'Blunderbuss that would wrong ye. For, be the powers!

and it's mistaken in the bed I was—what with botheration and potheen and the candle's going out; and divil a happy'orth did I drame where I was, till ye powred the wather all over me. So shake hands, me boy, and let us be frinds again; and sure it's myself that will bring Mrs. Curtis down to dine with ye at two o'clock this afternoon, and we'll send in the dinner and the potheen first. Progg and his man are in possession; and I feel like a defated ginral, but they're on their best behaviour, and so I have not been forced to give either of them a taste of the shillaylee. I'm sadly afraid that the chap you have sent up is a fool; so if he should forget to give you this letter, mind you ask him for it. Your wife sends you a million kisses through me, and believe me, my frind, to remain 'Ever yours,

"GORMAN O'BLUNDERBUSS.

"Very good," said Frank Curtis, as he brought the perusal of this curious epistle to an end: and having paid and dismissed the messenger, he sat himself down to reflect upon the manner in which he ought to receive his wife and the gallant gentleman.

On the one hand was the sense of the injury he had received, or fancied he had received; for he could not well embrace the double conviction that Mrs. Curtis was *not* faithless, and that the captain was *not* treacherous. On the other hand were numerous motives persuasive of an amicable course,—the want of society, the shame of declaring himself to be a cuckold—and last, though not least, the infinite terror in which he stood of Gorman O'Blunderbuss. These reasons were weighty and powerful, and they grew stronger and stronger as the dinner-hour advanced,—until they became completely triumphant when a hamper was sent up, containing cold fowls, ham, wine, dessert, whiskey, and cigars.

No longer hesitating what course to pursue, Frank superintended the laying of the cloth and the arrangement of the provisions upon the table: he decanted the wine—tasted it—and found it excellent,—and, these little proceedings having put him into a thorough good humour, he received his wife and the captain, when they made their appearance, as if nothing had occurred to ruffle his mind with regard to them.

Mrs. Curtis thought it necessary to go into hysterics at the sight of her beloved husband in a spunging-house; but she speedily recovered upon the said beloved husband's kindly recommending her not to make a fool of herself;—and the trio sat down to dinner, at which they made themselves very comfortable indeed. The captain proposed that as the wine-glasses were particularly small, they should drink their Sherry from tumblers, and the motion was adopted after a feeble opposition on the part of the lady.

"Well, Cu-r-r-i-tis, me boy," exclaimed the gallant gentleman, when they had made an end of eating, having done immense justice to the viands provided, "what are ye after now? It is n't staying here all your life that you can be thinking of—"

"Nor do I intend to stop in this cursed hole many hours longer," interrupted Frank. "I expect to go over to the Bench, at five o'clock."

"The Binch!" cried the captain, overjoyed at the plan chalked out: "be Jasus! and it's the wisest thing ye can be after, my frind! The Binch is a glorious place—and ye'll be as comfortable there as at home. The portier is the best in all London; and it's worth while to be in the Binch for the pleasure of drinking it. Not that I'm a great admirer of malt, Milm," he added, turning politely towards

Mrs. Curtis; "but the porther of the Binch is second best to rale potheen. Then the amusements of the Binch, Mim, are delightf! There's the parade to walk upon—and there's the racquet ground when ye're tired of the parade—and there's the dolphin-pump—and the coffee-house, a riglar taven!—In fact," exclaimed the gallant gentleman, quite lost in admiration of all the beautiful views and scenes he was so enthusiastically depicting, "the Binch is a perfect palace of a prison, and I only wish I was there myself."

"I'm sure I should be most happy to change places with you, captain," observed Frank Curtis, dully.

"I wouldn't deprive ye of the pleasure, me boy, for all the wor-r-ld!" cried O'Blunderbuss, in a tone of the utmost sincerity. "But what's to be done next? Those bastes of the earth are in possession of the garrison, and every stick will be sould up by them—the ragamuffin scamps that they are!"

"The wife and children must take a lodging over the water, close by the Bench," said Curtis; "and if Sir Christopher won't come forward to assist me, I must either get the Inlues or go through the Insolvent's Court—I don't care much which. My friend, the Earl of Dillinggate, did both—"

"Do the holy poker-r! and it's myself that will call on Sir Christopher-r in such a strait as this," vociferated the captain; "and although he did knock me down from the carriage window, the last time—"

"What!" ejaculated Frank, as much amused as astonished at the information which the gallant officer had so inadvertently let slip; "Sir Christopher knocked you down?"

"Blood and thunther!" roared the captain, becoming as red as scarlet; "and was it afther making a fool of myself that I was? For sure and it was Sir Christopher that was knocked down—and I didn't like to tell ye about it before, seeing that he's your own nat'ral uncle. But it's myself that will call upon him and offer the most abject apology; and I'll skin him alive if he don't come forward as he ought to do, and pay all your debts, my dear boy. So you persave that there's some use in having such a friend as Gorman O'Blunderbuss, of Bluntherbuss Park, Connemarr-ra, Ir-r-eland!" added the martial gentleman, with a awful rattling of the r's.

"The sooner I move over to the neighbourhood of the Bench, the better," said Mrs. Curtis; "for I am sick and tired of living in Baker Street. Just now, when I came out, it seemed to me that all the people I met laughed in my face, as if they knew our circumstances."

"I wish I had seen them dar-r to laugh!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss, lifting up an empty bottle, and flourishing it over his head: "I'd have sent them slap into the middle of next week, so that they should miss resaying their money next Saturday night."

In such pleasant chat as this, did the trio while away the time until about a quarter to five, when Mr. Pepperton made his appearance to announce that the office had been searched, that three detainees had been found, and that the *habeas corpus* was all in apple-pie order.

Frank Curtis accordingly rang the bell, and ordered his bill. In about a quarter of an hour it was brought;—and thus it ran:—

MR. CURTIS'S ACCOUNT.

Room	10	6
Breakfast	3	0
Eggs	0	6
Messenger to Carey Street	2	6
Reading Newspapers	1	0
Dinner	5	0
Porter	0	6
Gin and Cigars	5	6
Bread and cheese for Supper	2	6
Porter	0	6
Room	10	6
Breakfast	3	0
Eggs	0	6
Messenger to Baker Street	3	0
Use of table-cloth, knives, and forks, &c., gentleman providing his own dinner	2	6
Ethas	5	0
	42	15 6

"Why, my good woman," exclaimed Frank Curtis, amazed at such a terrific attempt at imposition, "this account is absurd. Besides, there are two things in it that I paid for myself—I mean the messenger yesterday and to-day."

"Master says it's all right, sir," observed the Lairdian.

"And then you charge a shilling for reading two newspapers a fortnight old," cried Frank, more and more bewildered as he studied the items of the bill. "five shillings for extras! Why—what the devil are the extras, since it seems to me that you have taken precious good care to omit nothing?"

"The extras is soap, and candles, and so on," said the woman, growing impatient.

"Then, be Jasus! and just let me soap over Mr. Mac Grab with a shillalah!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss, starting from his seat. "It's afther robbing my frind, ye are—ye bastes of the earth!"

Mr. Pepperton however interfered, and represented to the two gentlemen that there was no possibility of obtaining redress—that sheriff's-officers might charge exactly what they liked—and that it would be much better to pay the bill without any haggling. The amount was accordingly liquidated, and the old woman received half-a-crown, as a gratuity, which she took in a manner most unequivocally denoting that she had expected at least four times as much.

"Well," exclaimed Frank Curtis, as soon as she had left the room, "of all infernal impositions this is the greatest! Supposing I was a poor devil—"

"Then you would have been bundled straight off to Whitecross Street at once," observed Pepperton.

"Lord bless you, my dear sir—there's an aristocracy amongst debtors as well as in every thing else in this country."

"I always thought the law was the same for rich or poor," said Curtis.

"You never were under a greater mistake in your life," returned the solicitor. "Money is all-powerful in England, and makes the gentleman; and gentlemen are treated quite differently from common people. Such establishments as the Bench and the Fleet* are for those who can afford to pay for a *habeas*: while those who cannot, must go to

* Within the last few years the Fleet has been suppressed, and the Bench, under the general name of the Queen's Prison, has become the receptacle for all metropolitan debtors who are enabled to purchase the luxury of a *habeas corpus*.

the County Gaol. These spunging-houses, too, are places of accommodation, for the use of which people must pay liberally."

"Or rather be robbed vilely," said Frank. "But never mind—it can't be helped. When shall I have to go over to the Bench?"

"The tipstaff is no doubt already waiting at the public-house opposite," replied the lawyer.

"Then I'll be off at once," exclaimed Curtis, rising from his chair.

"Be the power-rs! but we'll see ye safe over to the Bench!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss; "for it may be that I shall have to thrash the Marshal or skin a tun-rukey to renther the people decently civil in that ilgant istablishment."

"Yes—you come with me, captain," said Frank, who had been thinking of some means to separate his amiable wife and his devoted friend. "You can put Mrs. C. into a hackney-coach; and to-morrow morning, my dear," he added, turning towards his spouse, "you can look out for a lodging somewhere in the neighbourhood of the prison."

"But you do n't mean to remain all alone to-night in Baker Street, with those odious officers in the house?" exclaimed Mrs. Curtis, not admiring the proposed arrangement.

"It would not be proper for the captain to stay in the house now that I am away," said Frank, hastily, and without daring to look at his gallant friend: indeed, scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when he was surprised at his courage in having dared to utter them.

Fortunately the captain took the observation in good part, and even expressed his approval of it; for it struck the martial gentleman that he should stand a much better chance of amusing himself with Frank Curtis in the Bench, with the interior arrangements of which he was pretty well acquainted from old experience, than in the society of Mrs. Curtis in Baker Street. The lady could not, therefore, offer any further opposition to the arrangement proposed; but she darted an angry look upon the captain, who responded by one of earnest appeal to her mercy.

She now took leave of her husband, and was escorted by Captain O'Blunderbuss to the nearest coach-stand; and as some time elapsed ere he returned to the spunging-house, it is presumable that he had a little difficulty in making his peace with her.

At length, however, he did re-appear; and, the messenger having conveyed the portmanteau over to the public-house opposite, for which he only charged a shilling, the prisoner proceeded thither in company with Mr. Mac Grab and Captain O'Blunderbuss, Pepperton bidding them farewell at the door.

In a little front parlour on the first floor of the public-house alluded to, sat half a-dozen seedy-looking men, who were delectably occupied in smoking cigars and drinking hot gin-and-water. Their conversation was doubtless very amusing to themselves; but it would have been very boring to strangers;—for the topic seemed entirely limited to what had taken place that day at the Insolvent Debtors' Court, or at the Judges' Chambers. There, in that same room, were those men accustomed to meet every afternoon (Sunday excepted), at about the same hour; and their discourse was invariably on the same subjects. They were tipstaffs—or, more properly speaking, perhaps, tipstaves: they lived in the atmosphere of debtors' prisons and

law-courts;—and all their information was circumscribed to the transactions thereof. When they were not hovering about the lobbies of the Fleet or the Bench, they were "down at Westminster," or "up at Portugal Street;" and if not in any of those places—why, then they were at the public-house.

It was to one of these worthies that Mac Grab introduced Mr. Francis Curtis; and as the tipstaff thus particularised had not finished his cigar nor his gin-and-water, Mr. Frank Curtis and Captain O'Blunderbuss sat down to keep him company till he had. Half an hour afterwards a hackney-coach was sent for; and the prisoner, his gallant friend, and the officer were speedily on their road to the King's Bench prison.

Curtis spoke but little during the transit: he felt nervous at the idea of going to his new home. But the captain rattled away as if he were determined to speak for himself and his friend both; and the tipstaff was still in a state of uncertainty as to whether he should set the gallant gentleman down as a very extraordinary personage, or as a most wondrous liar, when the vehicle stopped at a little low door in a gloomy brick wall.

"Be Jasus' and here's the Bench already," exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, thrusting his head out of the coach-window. "That house there, with the trees before it, Frank, is the Marshal's—and a very decent berth he's got of it: I should n't mind standing in his shoes at all, at all. But come along, me dear friend."

Thus speaking, the captain leapt from the vehicle, followed by Frank Curtis and the tipstaff; and, having traversed an enclosure formed by the gloomy-looking wall above alluded to and the high spike-topped boundary of the prison itself, the trio ascended a few steps which led them into the upper lobby of the King's Bench.

CHAPTER CV.

THE KING'S BENCH PRISON.

THE upper lobby was a small, dirty, and sombre-looking outwork of the vast establishment. A huge clock hung against one of the walls—a roasting fire burnt in the grate—and a stout, elderly turnkey, who spoke with a provincial accent, was seated on a high stool near the inner door, watching the persons who came out of the prison, and on whose countenance the glare of a powerful light was thrown by a tin reflector. Grouped near him were several char-women and messengers, engaged in the double occupation of discussing a pot of the best ale and the scandal of the Bench; while another turnkey—a short, active, bustling little fellow, who rejoiced in the nickname of "Buffer"—was seated inside a small enclosure formed by wood-work breast-high, examining a greasy and well-thumbed book containing sundry hieroglyphics which were supposed to be entries of the prisoners' names.

To Mr. Buffer was Mr. Frank Curtis duly introduced by the tipstaff; and the young gentleman's appellations were forthwith inscribed in the greasy book. He was then desired to pay his gate-fee, which he accordingly did; and, these little matters being settled, Mr. Buffer politely informed him that he might "go inside." The head turnkey—who was the stout, elderly man above alluded to—there-

upon opened the door at which he was seated; and Captain O'Blunderbuss led the way, first across a small yard, next through the lower lobby—and thence into the grand enclosure of the King's Bench itself.

Captain O'Blunderbuss turned sharp round to the left, and stopped in admiration before a low building with a roof slanting down from the high wall against which it stood.

"There!" cried the gallant officer, in an ecstasy of enthusiasm: "what place should you be aither taking *that* to be."

"Why—I should say it was the scullery or the coal-cellars," replied Frank.

"Be Jasus! me dear find—and you're insultin' the finest fature in this fine prison," exclaimed the captain "it's the coffee-house."

Mr. Curtis did not like to say how deeply he was disappointed at the unpromising exterior of an establishment which his companion seemed so especially to admire; and he therefore silently followed his guide into the coffee-room, which was just large enough to contain four very little tables and yield accommodation to about a dozen people at a time.

There was nearly that number present when Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis entered the place; and as there were not two seats disengaged, the gallant officer put his arm akimbo, fixed his eyes sternly on a stout, inoffensive-looking old gentleman, and, without positively addressing his words to him, exclaimed, "Be the holy poker-r! and I should advise some one to be aither making room on a binch for my frind and myself—or I'll know the rayson why!"

This inoffensive-looking gentleman shrank dismayed into a corner, and two or three others pressing closer together, sufficient space was obtained to afford Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis seats; and the former, as he took his place at a table, cast a particularly ferocious glance around on the assembled company, as much as to say, "Be the power-rs! and ye'd better not be aither having any of your nonsense with me!" But as no one at that moment seemed at all inclined to make even an attempt to interfere with the gallant gentleman, his countenance gradually lost its menacing aspect; and he ordered the waiter—a slipshod, dirty boy—to bring a bottle of wine, spirits not being allowed.

The company presented to the view of Mr. Frank Curtis rather a motly aspect. There was a sample of nearly all kinds of social distinctions,—a sprig of the aristocracy—a broken-down sporting gentleman—a decayed tradesman—a bankrupt merchant—an insolvent parson—a ruined gamester—a prize-fighter—a horse-chaunter—an attorney, who had over-reached himself—a poor author—and one or two others who bore the vague and much misappropriated denomination of "gentleman." All these were herding together in a glorious state of democratic equality; for a debtors' prison goes far to level distinctions, the lordlings being very often glad to obtain a draught of ale from the pewter-pot of a butcher.

The entrance of Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis, both of whom were taken for new prisoners and stared at accordingly, seemed to have interrupted a conversation that was previously going on;—and for a few minutes a dead silence prevailed. But at last, when the wine which the captain had ordered was brought in, and that gallant gentleman and

Curtis gave evident proofs of an inclination to enjoy themselves by enquiring likewise for cigars, the company recovered the feeling of hilarity on which the awful appearance of O'Blunderbuss had seemed for a few minutes to throw a complete damper.

"Well, how did Jackson get on to-day at Portugal Street?" enquired a rakish, dissipated looking young gentleman, who was smoking a cigar and drinking a pint of Port-wine.

"He got sent back for six months," answered the person to whom the question was put, and who was a stout, big man, in very seedy attire. "It seems that his schedule was made up of accommodation bills, and the opposition was desperate."

"You talk of accommodation bills, Muggles," observed the young gentleman; "why, all my debts are in paper of that kind. There's seventeen thousand pounds against me at the gate; and I'd take my affidavit that I never had more than three thousand in actual value. So I suppose I shall get it from the old Commissioner?"

"No, you won't, Pettifer, my boy," cried a short, elderly, dapper-looking man, putting down a quart pot in which his countenance had been burned for upwards of a minute before he began to speak, "your father's a lord—and that's enough," he added, looking mysteriously around.

"Well, so he is," said the Honourable Mr. Pettifer, lolling back in a very aristocratic manner, and speaking for the behoof of Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis; "it's true that my father is Lord Cobbleton, and that I'm his second son. But, after all—that's a nobleman's second son?"

"Be Jasus! and what indeed?" cried the captain. "Why, my grandfather was Archbishop of Dublin—and my father was his son—and I'm my father's son—and yet, be the power-rs! I'm only a capthain now! But if I had n't half a million, or som thrifle of the kind locked up in Chancery, I should be aither rolling in my carriage—although I do keep a buggy and a dog-cart, as it is—and my frind Curthis here, jintlemen, would n't be in the Bench for two hunthred thousand pounds, as he is and bad luck to it!"

"Well—but you know, captain," said Frank, who was determined not to be behind his gallant companion in the art of lying, and who therefore very readily took up the cue prepared for him,—"you know, captain, that the moment my god-father the Duke comes home, I shall be all right."

"Right!—right as a thrivet, me boy!" vociferated O'Blunderbuss; "and then we'll carry on the war-r-r with a vengeance."

These remarks on the part of the captain and Frank Curtis produced a deep impression upon the greater portion of the company present; but two or three of the oldest prisoners tipped each other the wink slyly, as much as to say, "Ain't they coming it strong?—although they did not dare provoke the ire of the ferocious Hibernian by any overt display of their scepticism.

"Speaking of Chancery," said an old, miserable-looking man, in a wretchedly thread-bare suit of black, and whose care-worn countenance showed an intimate acquaintance with sorrow,—"speaking of Chancery," he repeated, leaning forward from the corner in which he had hitherto remained silent and almost unobserved,—"you can't know Chancery, sir—begging your pardon—better or more bitterly than I do."



"Ah! tell the gentlemen your story, Prout," exclaimed one of the company. "'Pon my soul 'tis a hard case, and a stain upon a civilised country."

"A stain!" ejaculated the old man, whose name appeared to be Prout;—"a stain!" he cried, in a tone of painful irony;—"it is a horror—an abomination—an atrocity that demands vengeance on those legislators who know that such abuses exist and who will not remedy them! Chancellors—Vice-Chancellors—Judges—Law-Lords—Members of Parliament—Attorney-Generals—Solicitor-Generals—all, all for the last two-and-twenty years, so help me God! have been familiar with my case—and yet the Court of Chancery remains as it is, the most tremendous abuse—the most damnable inquisition—the most grinding, soul-crushing, heart-breaking engine of torture that the ingenuity of man ever yet invented! Yes—all that—and more—more, if I could find stronger language to express myself in—is that earthly reflection of hell—the Court of Chancery!"

The old man had spoken with a volubility which had increased in quickness and in emphasis until it positively grew painful to hear;—and his countenance became flushed with a hectic, unhealthy

red—and his eyes, usually leaden and dull, were fired with an unnatural lustre—and his chest heaved convulsively—and his lips quivered with the dreadful excitement produced in his attenuated and worn-out frame by the remembrance of his wrongs.

Remembrance!—as if he ever forgot them! No—the Chancery Court was the subject of his thoughts by day and his dreams by night: every thing he heard, or saw, or read, was so tortured by his morbid imagination as to bear some analogy, remote or near, to the proceedings at the Chancery Court; when he had a meal, he wondered that the Chancery Court had left it to him—and when he had none, he said that the Chancery Court made him starve;—if he felt in tolerably good health, it was because he heard of some case in Chancery even more flagrant than his own—and that was a consolation to his diseased mind; and if he felt ill, which was nearly always the case, he declared that the Chancery Court made him so—in fact, he was truly a victim, in every sense and way, of that tremendous tribunal which has instruments of torture far more terrible for the feelings than those which the Inquisition of Spain ever invented for the body!

"Yes," exclaimed Prout, after a few moments' pause, "and all that diabolical tyranny is carried on under the semblance and with the solemn forms of justice. You go into a fine court, where you see a man of splendid intellect, fine education, and profound knowledge, seated in a chair, with the wig and gown; and before him are rows of barristers almost as learned as himself. Well—would you not think that you were in a tribunal worthy of the civilisation of this country? Yet—better were it if savages from the South Sea Islands became your judges; better to die upon the threshold of that court, than enter its walls. It is a damnable and a cursed tyranny, I repeat; and the English are a weak—a pusillanimous—a spaniel-like race, that they do not rise in rebellion against that monstrous tribunal!"

Again he paused, overpowered by excitement:—but there was something terribly real and awfully sincere—aye, and sternly true—in that man's denunciations!

"Yes—I say," he resumed, after having refreshed himself from a powder-pot near him—though there had been a time when he was accustomed to drink wine,—“the English people are a nation of paltry cowards for allowing this hideous Chancery Court to uprear its head amongst them. Did not the French destroy their Bastille?—and was the Bastille ever half so bad, in one way, as this Chancery Court is in another? It is all useless for two or three people to declaim, or two or three authors to write, against such a flagrant abuse. 'Tis a public grievance, and must be put down by the public hand! The whole body of lawyers are against law-reform—and the profession of the law has vast influence upon both Houses of Parliament. From the Houses of Parliament, then, we have no hope: the strong hand of the people must do it. You might as well ask the Lords to abolish hereditary aristocracy, or the King to dethrone himself, as expect the Houses of Parliament to sweep away the Chancery Court.”

"But could we do without it?" enquired an attentive listener.

"Do without it!" exclaimed Prout, indignantly—almost contemptuously, at the nature of the question: "certainly we can! France does without it—Holland does without it—Prussia does without it—Switzerland does without it—and the United States do without it;—and where is the law of property better administered than in those countries? There the transfer of land, or the bequeathing of other property, is as simple as that of merchandise or stock; but here—here, in England, which vaunts its freedom and its civilization, the process is encumbered with forms and deeds which leave the whole arrangement liable to flaws, difficulties, and endless embarrassments. Talk of Equity, indeed! 'tis the most shameless mockery of justice ever known even amongst barbarians. But let me tell you an anecdote? In 1763, a suit was commenced in Chancery relative to some lawful property on which there was a windmill. The cause was not referred to the Master till 1796—thirty-three years having elapsed, and the lawyers, who had grown old during the proceedings, not having been idle. In the Master's office did the case remain till 1815—though the new lawyers who had succeeded the old batch that had died off in the meantime, were as active as the matter would allow

them to be. Well—in 1815 the Master began to look into the business; but, behold! the windmill had disappeared—it had tumbled down—it had wasted away into dust—not a trace of it remained!" actually shrieked out the old man, in the excitement of his story.*

"Thus the affair was fifty-two years in Chancery, and was knocked on the head after all?" observed one of the company present.

"While Law slept, Time was awake and busy, you see," said Prout, with a bitter irony which actually chilled the hearts of his auditors. "But I can give you plenty of examples of the infernal—heart-breaking delays of Chancery—and my own amongst the rest presently," he continued. "There is the case of *Bute versus Stuart*: it began in 1793—and in 1813 a step was made in the cause!† Then, again, you have the case of the *Attorney-General versus Trevelyan*: it commenced in 1685, and is an affair involving an endowment for a Grammar-School at Morpeth. This cause never will be finished!‡ But how much property do you suppose there is locked up in Chancery—eh? Ah! now I am going to tell you something astounding indeed—and yet as true as the Gospel! *Thirty-eight millions sterling* are locked up in that dreadful tribunal. A tribunal!—no—it is a sepulchre—a tomb—a grave in which all justice and all hopes are interred! But you will say that this enormous fund is only as it were in temporary trust, to be in due time portioned out to its rightful owners. Pshaw!—nonsense! More than *one-third* concerns persons who are dead and have left no heirs, or else whose representatives are ignorant of their rights. The Suits' Fund is a bank of plunder—of shameful, diabolical plunder effected under the *forms of the law*!"

"But what about your own case, old fellow?" enquired the Honourable Mr. Petifer.

"I'll tell you in a moment, gentlemen," cried Prout, rejoiced to observe the interest created by his structures on the most hellish tribunal that ever disgraced a civilised country. "Twenty-five years ago," he said, "I was a prosperous man, having a good business in the City; and I had managed to save four thousand pounds by dint of strict economy and the closest attention to my affairs. A lawyer—a friend of mine—told me of a favourable opportunity to place the sum out at good interest and on the best possible security. A gentleman, in fact, wanted to borrow just that amount on mortgage, he having a capital estate. The matter was fully investigated, and the security was considered unexceptionable. So I lent the money; and for three

* The anecdote is a positive fact!

† It is not terminated yet!

‡ Mr. Prout's prophecy seems likely to be fulfilled; for the case pends yet, having now lasted *one hundred and sixty-two years!!!* In 1710 Lord Chancellor Harcourt made a decree commanding the boundaries of the litigated land to be ascertained, and the commissioner appointed to carry this decree into effect, reported that no boundaries could be traced! Proceedings continued; and on the 25th of January, 1846, the case was re-argued before Vice-Chancellor Shadwell, eight counsel being engaged for relator, lessee, trustees, corporation, and the various other parties interested. The Vice-Chancellor of England referred the matter to the Master's Office, where it is not likely to be disinterred for the next half century! Really, we English are a highly civilised people: a law-suit may be perpetuated through a dozen generations, without any delay or fault on the side of the parties interested—the whole and sole blame resting upon the Chancery Court.

years the interest was regularly paid, and all went on well. The gentleman suddenly died; and his nephew, who inherited the estate, hunted out an old entail, effected a hundred and fifty years previously, and of the existence of such an entail no mention had been made in subsequent deeds. So the nephew would not acknowledge the validity of the mortgage, and refused to pay me a fraction of my four thousand pounds. He would not even settle the interest. I was therefore forced into Chancery; and seven years afterwards I got a decree in my favour, but I was sent into the Master's Office on account of certain details which I will not stop to explain to you. This was fifteen years ago—and I am still in Chancery! I have spent three thousand pounds in costs—and am totally ruined. The excitement and worry of law made me neglect my business: my affairs fell into confusion—my creditors took all my stock in trade—and here have I been eleven years for the balance of my liabilities. Twenty-two years have I been engaged in law—and have not yet got justice! And yet I am told that I live in a civilised country, where the laws are based on common-sense wisdom, and where the meanest as well as the highest individual is sure to obtain justice. Justice indeed!—such justice as one finds in the Chancery Court! My original claim was for four thousand pounds—and I have spent three thousand in costs, and owe my lawyer five hundred pounds more. But what do you think of this? Eight years ago a *written question* was put by the Master to the respondent in the suit; and it is still a matter of dispute whether he is to answer it or not! Here's law for you—here's justice! Why—it is enough to make a man curse himself for belonging to a country in which such things take place: it is enough to make me ashamed of being an Englishman! Suppose a savage from the South Sea Islands came to England—behold all the glitter and glory of our outward appearance of civilisation—studied our language, and was then told of such cases as these? What would he think. He would say, '*After all, you are in reality a very barbarous people; and I shall be glad when I get back to my own far-off island.*'"

* Mr. Commissioner Fane, of the London Bankruptcy Court, was brought up as a Chancery lawyer; and in a recent "Letter to Lord Cottenham" he thus explains the causes of that shameful dilatoriness which characterises Chancery proceedings—

"In Chancery the suitor applies first to the judge; every thing is done in writing. The judge, after great expense has been incurred and after a long delay, makes a decree; that decree tells the Master, in endless detail, what he is to do (just as if he required to be taught the simplest matters); the decree is drawn up, not by the judge, who might be thought wiser than the Master, but by the registrar, who, in teaching the Master, frequently omits some material direction; the parties then adjourn to the Master's office; there the matter lingers, month after month and year after year; at last the Master makes his report, tells the Court what he has found, and sometimes what he would have found if the registrar had authorised him to do so, and at last the Court either acts or sends the matter back to the Master with new directions. Meanwhile, as Lord Bacon said about two hundred years ago, 'Though the Chancery pace be slow, the suitor's pulse beat quick.' I know of nothing to which to compare this process except the game of battledore and shuttlecock, in which the poor suitor plays the part of shuttlecock, and is tossed from the judge to the Master, and from the Master to the judge, over and over, till the game is closed only too often by despair, insolvency, or death."

"As far as all this goes, you are right enough," observed an attorney, who was one of the company present: "but had you gone much farther, you would have been equally correct. You may denounce nearly all our laws and statutes to be radically bad and a disgrace to civilisation. But it is useless to hope that an efficient reform will be ever effected by the Parliament; because the Parliament is loth to interfere with existing usages, and is afraid to meddle with existing rights. Nothing short of a Revolution can possibly accomplish a proper change."

"Why—this is treason!" exclaimed the Honourable Mr. Pettifer, his aristocratic feelings deeply wounded by the lawyer's bold and manly declaration.

"It may be treason—but it is nevertheless the truth," said the attorney, with the cool firmness of a man entertaining an honest conviction of the justice of his observations. "I declare most of our laws to be a disgrace and a shame. In France all the laws are contained in one book, accessible to every person: here, in this country, they are totally inaccessible to the community in general. Do you think France would ever have had her Code without a Revolution? * Do you know how silly, absurd, and contradictory are some of our statutes—those statutes which are approved of by the Law-Officers of the Crown, and enacted by wise senators? There is a statute, for example's sake,† which decrees that one half of the penalty inflicted in a particular case is to go to the informer, and the other half to the King. And yet under this statute Judges sentence men to transportation—say, fourteen years' transportation, to be halved by the informer and the King! Then there are statutes still upon the book, and which, though unrepealed, could scarcely be put into execution without inflicting an odious tyranny. A statute of Edward VI. forbids agricultural labourers to hire themselves out, or be hired, by the day, and not for less than a year. By a statute of William and Mary, no peasant may sell goods in a town, except at a fair; and a statute of Henry VII. decrees, under severe penalties, that no cattle shall be killed in a walled town, nor in Cambridge. There is also a statute, I forget of which reign, enacting that no shoemaker may be a tanner, nor a tanner a shoemaker. The laws relating to Marriage are in many respects absurd, and in others obscure.

* "The Code Napoleon is sometimes declared to be a failure, but it has been no failure. In place of the previously differing laws of the provinces of the ancient kingdom it has substituted a consistent uniform code for the entire of France. But it is urged, that it has been buried under a load of commentaries. Of course there has been a pile of judicial constructions, as must be the case with the text of every code. But these constructions have a platform to rest upon, framed in the light of modern science. Ours are wholly different; they have no such foundation to settle upon. They rest upon a mingled heap of rubbish and masonry, of obsolete laws and laws in force. Even the basement story has not been firmly laid, as in France. This, however, it is that the nation requires to have done; it requires an entirely new legal edifice to be erected. All that is good in the past it would have preserved under a new and better arrangement; and then the mass of statutes, reports, and text-books from which the analysis had been made, and which had long embarrassed both the learned and unlearned—declared by parliamentary authority to be no better than waste paper—null and void, and no more citable for any purpose of legal argument, illustration, or decision."—*Black Book of England*.

† 53rd, George III.

A marriage contracted by persons under age, by means of license, without the consent of their parents, is unlawful; but such persons may contract a lawful marriage by banns, although without the consent of their parents. Thousands and thousands of persons have been led to believe that it is lawful for a man to marry his deceased wife's sister; whereas it is *not lawful*, and the issue of such a marriage is illegitimate."

At this moment the learned gentleman was interrupted by the clanging of a loud bell, carried by a person who was proceeding round the main building of the prison, and who every now and then stopped ringing for the purpose of vociferating as loud as he could—"Strangers, women, and children, all out!"

"Shall you have to leave?" demanded Frank Curtis, in a whisper to his friend the captain.

"Divil a hap'orth of it, me boy!" exclaimed O'Blunderbuss. "The person who keeps the Coffee-house will be glad to give me a bed as well as yourself; for money, frind Cur-r-its, procures everything in this blessed Spike-Island."

Another half-hour was passed in discourse on various topics, the inmates of the Coffee-house parlour having become wearied of commenting upon the laws of their country; and, at the expiration of that interval renewed shouts, now emanating from the immediate vicinity of the lower lobby, warned all strangers to quit the prison. At the same time the parlour was rapidly cleared, O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis alone remaining there:—for it seemed to be a rule on the part of the prisoners to rush to the gate, for the purpose of seeing the "strangers" take their departure.

The captain now gave a furious pull at the bell; and, when the slip-shod waiter appeared, he demanded a conference with the keeper of the Coffee-house. This request was speedily complied with; and satisfactory arrangements were entered into for beds. Another bottle of wine was ordered, the captain persuading Curtis that it would be better for him to take his first survey of all the grand features of the Bench in the morning, and to pass the evening in conviviality. Thus they accordingly did until eleven o'clock, when the lights in the parlour were put out, and the two gentlemen were shown to their respective bed-chambers—the said chambers being each about twice as big as a coffin, and quite as inconveniently angular.

CHAPTER CVI.

A FARTHER INSIGHT INTO THE KING'S BENCH.

AT half-past seven o'clock on the following morning, the slip-shod waiter knocked at Mr. Curtis's door, exclaiming, "Please, sir, you must get up, and go down to the lobby by eight, 'cos you 're wanted."

"Who want's me there?" demanded Frank, leaping from his bed, and suddenly animated by the hope that Sir Christopher had accidentally heard of his predicament and had come to pay his debts.

But the boy had hurried down stairs again; and Curtis was accordingly compelled to hurry over his toilette in a state of profound suspense. By the time his ablutions were performed and he was dressed, it was close upon eight o'clock; and he repaired to the gate, having bestowed *en passant* a thundering

knock with his clenched fist on the door of the captain's crib.

The gate of the lower lobby was not as yet opened; but in its immediate vicinity several of the prisoners were collected—some in dressing-gowns, others in their shirt-sleeves, and all having a certain air of seediness not observable elsewhere. At length, when the massive portal *did* expand, in rushed a motley assortment of messengers, charwomen, and such itinerant venders as milk-men, water-cress boys, and the fustian-clad individual who sold red herrings and shrimps.

When this influx of varied specimens of animated nature had passed, Frank Curtis entered the lobby and demanded of a one-armed turnkey standing before the fire, "who it was that required his presence?"

"Me and my partners, sir," was the reply.

"And what for?" enquired Frank.

"Just to take your likeness, sir," was the farther explanation given.

"My likeness!" cried the young gentleman, glancing rapidly around in the expectation of beholding an artist with pallet and brushes all ready; but, not perceiving any such individual, he began to look very ferocious indeed, under the impression that the turnkey had a mind to banter him.

"We call it taking the likeness of a new prisoner, sir," observed the one-armed functionary, who was really a very civil fellow, "when we have him here by day-light just to take a look at him—so that we may know him again," he added significantly. "You see, sir, there 's between three and four hundred prisoners in the college—we call it a college, sir, sometimes—and it is n't a very easy thing to remember every new-comer, unless we have a good look at him."

"Oh! now I understand you," exclaimed Frank, laughing heartily at the idea of having his likeness taken in such a style.

While he was yet indulging in this expression of his mirth, the other turnkeys made their appearance, and, each individually wishing him a "good morning," they scanned him from head to foot—apparently committing to memory every one of his features *seriatim*. Frank tried to look as unconcerned as possible; but he nevertheless felt very uncomfortable, and was heartily glad when the operation, which lasted about five minutes, was over. The other turnkeys then withdrew; and Curtis remained alone with the one-armed official.

"Nice place this, sir, for a prison—ain't it?" asked the latter, taking his seat on a stool near the door, which stood open, and whence the eye commanded a view of the spacious racquet-ground and a small portion of the main building.

"Well—it might be a great deal worse," replied Frank. "You must have some strange characters here?" he added, enquiringly.

"I b'lieve ye!" exclaimed the turnkey, fixing his looks mysteriously upon the young gentleman in a species of dim intimation that it was indeed a very remarkable place. "You see that old feller in the ragged blue coat, a-rolling the fust racquet-ground there? Well—he come here to this prison twenty year ago in his carriage, and had his livery servants to wait upon him; and now he's glad to drag that roller every morning for a few pence."

"And can't he manage to get out?" asked Frank, with an ominous shudder.

"Lord bless you, sir," cried the turnkey, "he's his own prisoner!"

"His own prisoner!" repeated Curtis. "What—do you mean to say that he keeps himself in the Bench?"

"I do, sir—and a many does the same," continued the turnkey, in a low, mysterious tone. "These poor creatures, sir, stay in prison so long that all their relations and friends dies off; and if they went out, they would n't have a soul to speak to, or a place to go to. So, if their creditors dies too and their discharge is sent 'em, they keep it in their pockets and never lodge it at the gate—'cos they prefer staying inside, where they have companions and can get a bit of something to eat in one way or another."

"This is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard in my life," said Frank.

"There's many things more stranger still here," returned his informant, who was pleased with the mysterious importance which his position as narrator of these marvels gave him. "What should you think of men putting themselves into prison, and making up their minds to stay here all their lives perhaps?"

"I should think you were joking if you said so," answered Curtis.

"Joking! Lord bless you, sir, I would n't joke about no such a thing," exclaimed the turnkey, with a spice of indignation in his manner. "But I'll tell you how it is. There—you see that stout man in the shooting-jacket a-bargaining for them bloaters with the chap that's sitting on the bench outside the Tap? Well—he committed a forgery, or summut of that kind; and, knowing there was a warrant against him, and not choosing to run away from London for fear of being took in the country, he got a fiend to arrest him for debt. So he immediately passed over to the Bench by *habeas*, and the warrant for felony was lodged at the gate against him. But his debts must be paid before the warrant can be executed; and as you see he's in a manner his own detaining creditor—leastways, his friend outside is—he is n't likely to have his discharge till the felony business can be settled somehow or other."

"The Bench is then a most convenient place for people who ought to be in Newgate?" said Curtis. "But live and learn; and the more one sees of the world—"

"The more curiouser it is—ain't it?" cried the turnkey. "Well—now you see that tall, stout gentleman there, walking up and down in front of the State House with the stick in his hand? He's been here some years, and is wery likely to stay a many years longer. His creditors allows him three guineas a week for his kindness in remaining a prisoner in the Bench."

"What!" ejaculated Curtis, now more astonished than ever. "His creditors pay him for staying here?"

"It's as true as you're alive, sir," was the reply; "and it's easy enough to explain, too. That gentleman has got a good landed estate, which is in the hands of his two or three principal creditors, who manage it and receive all the rents for the purpose of paying themselves their claims upon him. Well, now—if he went through the Insolvents' Court, all the creditors would come in for their share of the proceeds of the estate; and so the two or three principals ones allow him three guineas a week to keep him here and prevent him going through the

Court. It's a deuced good thing for him, I can tell you; and he's as happy as a King. He has his wife—leastways, his lady with him,—we call 'em all *wives* here;—and he's got a batch of the loveliest and nicest children you ever see. There they are, six—the little innocents—a-playing there in the mud, just as if there was n't no such place as prison at all; and yet they was all born up in that room there in the State House, with the green safe at the window and the flower-pots."

"And who is that lame, elderly man, running about with newspapers in his hand?" enquired Frank.

"He's the newsman of the Bench—and a prisoner like the rest on 'em," was the answer. "Ah! some years ago he was a rich man, and in a flourishing way of business. But he got into Chancery, and that's the same as getting into the Bench; 'cos one always leads to t' other—for even to be a winner in Chancery, one must pass at least a dozen years or so here fust. That seems to be the rule, as far as I can understand it. Well, sir—now that lame man is obliged to turn newsman; so you see there's a many reverses in this world, sir. Ah! the world's a queer place, ain't it?—almost as queer as the Bench itself!"

What the turnkey's notions of the world might be, it is not easy to conceive: but they were evidently somewhat dim and misty—inasmuch as he seemed impressed with the belief that the Bench and the world were two distinct places:—but, then, the Bench was *his* world, though not a prisoner there himself; and perhaps he established a distinction as existing between the "world within" and the "world without." Alas! many—many who *were* prisoners did the same!

"Who are those two ladies that have just come down to walk on the gravel there, by the side of the racquet-ground?" enquired Frank Curtis, much amused by the turnkey's gossip.

"We call that gravel-walk *the parade*," observed the official. "Those ladies are mother and daughter; and it's the daughter that's a prisoner. She's a devilish fine gal; and the old woman stays with her to take care of her. But she and the Honourable Mr. Pettifer are deuced thick together; and the mother winks at it. Such things will happen in the best regulated families—particklerly in the Bench, where no one ain't over and above partickler. This is n't the shop for morals, Mr. Curtis: all the young single women that comes here, is sure to get corrupted. But that's no look-out of mine;"—and with this solacing conclusion, the turnkey hit the lock of the door a tremendous blow with his key.

"Be the power-rs! and is it afther staling a march upon me that ye are?" vociferated a well-known voice at this moment; and the captain stalked up to the gate, looking quite fresh and blooming after a good night's rest and copious ablutions.

"They had me down to take my likeness," cried Frank; "or else I dare say I should have slept on till now."

"Well—we'll just make the round of the Bench, me boy," exclaimed the captain; "and by that time the breakfast will be ready. I've urthered it—hot rolls and coffee, with kidneys, eggs, cresses, and such like thiffies; and a walk will give us an appetite."

Curtis accordingly took his friend's arm; and they set out on their limited ramble.

"That building on your right, Frank," said the captain, "is the State House, where Government prisoners and such like spalpeens are kept—or ought to be; but the prisoners for debt get hould of the rooms there, and the devil himself can't turn 'em out. But here's the Tap: and this is the first lion of the Binch."

They entered a low and dirty-looking place, in which there were several common tables of the roughest description, and the surfaces of which were completely carved out into names, initial letters, men hanging, and a variety of devices—these ingenious and very elaborate specimens of wood-engraving having been effected by pen-knives. A tremendous fire burnt in the grate, round which were assembled several of the poorer class of prisoners and the messengers, eating their breakfast;—and, at one of the tables just alluded to, the newsman was sorting his papers.

As the captain and Curtis were retracing their way from an inspection of the interior of the tap-room, the former stopped at the bar, exclaiming to the man in attendance, "Two half pints, Mistor Vernon—and good mornin' to ye."

"You would not drink malt liquor so early, will you?" asked Frank, with a look of astonishment at his companion.

"Be Jasus! and it's for you to taste the porther, me boy!" exclaimed the captain. "Do n't you remember all I said yesterday in its praise? Come—dhrink!"

And Mr. Curtis was accordingly compelled to swallow half a pint of porter, though malt liquor before breakfast was somewhat repugnant to his taste. The beer was veritably of first-rate quality; and the captain was as proud to hear the young gentleman's eulogy on its merits, as if he had brewed it himself.

"Now let us continue our ramble," said he;—and away they went, arm-in-arm, the two or three poor prisoners who were lounging at the door of the Tap respectfully making room for them to pass.

Entering upon the parade, Frank now for the first time obtained a full view of the front of the main building—a long, gloomy, barrack-like structure, with half a dozen entrance-ways leading to the various staircases. Fixed to the ledges of many of the windows, were safes in which the prisoners kept their provisions; and in several instances these safes were covered with flower-pots containing sickly plants. Precisely in the centre of the building was the chapel; and over the chapel was the infirmary. Most of the rooms on the ground-floor were fitted up as little shops, the occupants being prisoners, and the business carried on being entirely in the "general line." The lumps of butter—wedges of cheese—red herrings—slices of bacon—matches—balls of twine—candles—racquet balls—sweet-stuff—loaves of bread—rolls—soap—eggs—and other articles of the nature usually sold in such magnificent marts of commerce, were arranged so as to make the best possible show, and carry out the spirit of competition which raged as fiercely in that little community as in the world without. A peep through the window of one of those miniature shops, showed the canisters of tea and the jars of tobacco and snuff standing orderly upon the shelves of three feet in length; and behind a counter, along which Tom Thumb could have walked in two strides, stood the stout proprietor of the concern,

examining with rueful looks the wonderful increase of chalk-marks which the morning's sales had compelled him to make upon a slate against the honoured names of his customers.

"Now look this way, me friend," cried the captain, as he forced Frank to turn round towards the racquet-courts. "D'ye see nothing particular?"

"Nothing but the high wall, with the spikes on the top, and the netting to prevent the balls from going over," answered Curtis.

"There—there, me boy!" vociferated O'Blunderbuss, impatiently pointing in a particular direction "Now d'ye see any thing worth looking at?"

"Well—I see the pump there," said Frank, vainly searching after a more interesting object.

"Be Jasus! and that's just what I wanted ye to see," exclaimed the captain. "It's the Dolphin-pump, me boy—the finest pump in Eur-r-ope—the pride of the Binch—But, be the power-rs! ye shall taste the wather and judge for yourself!"

Curtis protested that he would rather not;—the captain was however resolute; and a tumbler was borrowed from a prisoner who was smoking an early pipe at one of the ground-floor windows. Then the captain began to pump away like a madman; and Frank was compelled to imbibe a deep draught of the ice-cold water, which would have been pronounced delicious by any one who did not admire alcoholic beverages much better than Adam's ale.

"Do n't you mean to take a glass, captain?" enquired Frank.

"Be Jasus! and I know it of ould," returned that gallant gentleman: "so there's no need for me to pass an opinion upon it. Besides, it's not to astonish my stomach with any unusual dhrink that I'd be afther, Frank: but you're a young man, and can stand wather better than me."

Curtis did not consider the reasoning altogether conclusive: he however refrained from farther argument;—and the two gentlemen resumed their walk.

Between the eastern extremity of the main-building and that part of the wall which looked directly upon the Borough, was the market-place,—an assemblage of miserable sheds, where a butcher, a fishmonger, a greengrocer, and a vender of coals carried on each his peculiar traffic—the said spirited traders being prisoners as well as the shop-keepers above alluded to.

At a stall in the centre of the market, and at which vegetables, fruit, and fish were sold, stood a tall, thin, weather-beaten old woman, resembling a gipsy in dress as well as in complexion, and having an ancient bonnet perched most airily upon the top of her head. This respectable female was denominated "Old Nanny," and was in such wise greeted by Captain O'Blunderbuss, who informed Frank in a whisper that she was not a prisoner, and, in spite of competition, had pretty well the monopoly of the market.

"The fact is, me boy," he said, "she has the advantage of money. Those fellows in the sheds there, set up in business with a floating capital of eighteen-pence each, and can't afford to give credit; and a tradesman in the Binch who can't give credit, stands no more chance, be Jasus! of getting custom than if he began with an empty shop."

The captain now proceeded to show his friend the public kitchen, which was in the immediate vicinity of the market; and thence they passed up

the back of the main building, O'Blunderbuss especially directing Frank's attention to that quarter which was denominated "the Poor-Side."

The Poor-Side!—Yes in every public establishment in England, is the line of demarcation drawn between the rich and the poor,—in the debtors' prison as well as in the church of God! Oh! what a disgraceful thing is poverty made in this country! Why—the contamination of Newgate, if borne by a man possessing a well-filled purse, will be overlooked in society; while the rags that an unsullied character wears, are a ban—a stigma—a reproach! "He has been in the workhouse," or "She has been on the parish," are taunts as bitter in meaning and as keen in spirit, as the phrase "He has been in Newgate," or "She has just come from the treadmill." Aye—and even amongst the lowest classes themselves, it is a deeper stain to associate a name with the workhouse, than to connect it with the felons' gaol! Such is the dreadful—demoralizing consequence of that example set by the upper classes, whose ideas of men's excellence and worth are guided chiefly by the standard of the purse.

The Poor-Side!—And for whom is the Poor-Side of debtors' prisons instituted? For those who go penniless to gaol,—the best proof that they have profited nothing by the losses of their creditors,—the best evidence that their liabilities were legitimately contracted! But the fashionable swindler—your man-about-town—your *roué*—your rake, who gets into debt wherever he can, and without the slightest intention of ever paying a single farthing,—he drives down in his cab to the prison—treats the bailiff to wine upon the way—and takes with him into confinement all that remains to him of the plunder of duped tradesmen, there to spend it in riotous living and in the best room which the best quarter of the gaol can afford! If a debtors' prison have a *Poor-Side*, it ought also to have a *Swindlers'-Side*.

No word in the English language is used so frequently and so contemptuously as the monosyllable *Poor*. "Oh! he is a poor devil!" is a far worse character to give of any one, than to say at once, "He is dishonest." From the latter sentence there is a hopeful appeal in the question—"But can he pay?" "Yes—he can, if he chooses." "Oh! then, if he can, we will trust him and risk it." But from the former sentence there is no appeal; it is a judgment without qualification—a decision too positive and weighty to admit of a doubt. The objection—"Well, he may be poor; but he may also be honest," is never heard. The idea of poverty being honest! Why—in the estimation of an Englishman, *poverty* is a word expressing all that is bad. To say that a man is *poor*, is at once to sum up his character as every thing unprincipled and roguish. Such magic is there in the word, that rich men, and men well-to-do in the world, instantly button up their breeches' pockets when they hear it applied to a person. They seem to consider that a poor wretch can have no other possible object in view than to get the better of them. Poverty, in their eyes, is something that goes about preying upon the rich—something to be loathed and shunned—something that ought not to intrude itself into respectable places. A man may just as well be leprous, as be poor!

So undeniable are these truths—so universally recognised are these facts, that designing individuals always endeavour to seem well off, even if they be

insolvent. They dress well, because they know the sovereign influence of a good coat. They talk largely—because they see how necessary it is "to keep up appearances." They toss about their last few guineas, as the only means of baiting a hook to catch fresh dupes. It is impossible that a man, with fine clothes, well-polished boots, elegant guard-chain, and lemon coloured gloves,—it is impossible that such a man can be poor! Oh! no—trust him with anything! Why—what poor man would be perfumed as he is?—the aristocratic odour of wealth surrounds him as with an atmosphere peculiar to the rich. Trust him by all means!—But that poor-looking devil, who sneaks along the shady side of the way—who has a wife and half-a-dozen children at home—and who is struggling from morning to night to earn an honourable crust,—don't trust him—have nothing to do with him—don't assist him with the loan of a single sixpence—on the contrary, give him a thrust farther down into the mud, if you can;—because he is undisguisedly *poor*!

Such appear to be the rules of conduct in this enlightened and glorious country. God help the poor!—for poverty is a terrible crime in "merry England!"

The Poor-Side of the King's Bench struck Frank Curtis as being particularly miserable—it quite gave him the horrors! And no wonder;—for the architect—a knowing fellow was he!—had so arranged the building, that the windows of the Poor-Side should look upon the dust-bins and the conveniences. Yes—a knowing fellow was that architect! He understood what the poor are worth in this free and civilised land,—he saw in a moment where they ought to be put;—and therefore he arranged for their use a number of dens where the atmosphere was certain to be one incessant pestilential odour, and where he would have been sorry,—very sorry to have placed the kennel of his favourite hound!

Yes;—well might Frank Curtis feel the horrors—callous and indifferent as the young man naturally was—on beholding the Poor-Side. The ground-floor rooms were even at mid-day in a state of twilight, the colossal wall being only a few feet distant;—the windows were blackened with dirt; and from the upper ones hung a few rags—the miserable duds of the miserable, miserable inmates. Half-starved, pale, and emaciated women—the wives or daughters of those poor prisoners—were loitering at the doorways,—some with children in their arms—children, Oh! so wan and wasted—so sickly and so death-like—that it must have made their parents' hearts bleed to feel how light they were, and how famine-struck they seemed! And yet those little, starving children had their innocent winning ways, as well as the offspring of the rich; and they threw their skeleton arms around their mother's necks—and their lips sent forth those infantile sounds so sweet to mothers' ears;—but still the little beings seemed to be pining rapidly away through actual want and in the prison atmosphere! "God help the poor," we said ere now: but, Oh! with tearful eyes and beating heart do we exclaim—"God help the children of the poor!"

Frank Curtis and the captain, having now completed their walk round the prison, entered the parlour of the Coffee-house, where an excellent breakfast awaited them, and to which they did ample justice.

The repast being disposed of, Captain O'Blunderbuss took a temporary leave of Frank Curtis, it being arranged that the gallant officer should proceed to Baker Street in order to induce the men in possession, either by means of bribes or menaces, to allow Mrs. Curtis to remove as many valuables from the house as possible; and, this notable aim being achieved, the captain was to pay his respects to Sir Christopher Blunt.

Frank Curtis, being now temporarily thrown upon his own resources for amusement, strolled out upon the parade, and was gazing at the racquet-players, when Mr. Prout accosted him.

"Good morning, sir. Have you taken a survey of the Bench yet?" said the Chancery prisoner.

"I have been round the building, and seen all that's worth seeing, I believe," replied Curtis.

"But the Poor-Side appears to be a wretched place."

"Wretched!" cried Prout, in a bitter tone: "ah! you may well make that observation, sir! But if my affairs do not end in a speedy settlement, I shall have to move to that quarter myself."

"How is that?" enquired Frank.

"Do you not know—have you not yet learned that you must pay even to have a room in this prison—a place to which you do not come of your own accord?" said Prout. "A shilling a week is the room-rent; and he who cannot pay it, must go over to the Poor-Side. This is English justice, Mr. Curtis! You must pay to live in a prison!"

"It seems to me monstrously unfair—"

"Unfair! 'tis vile—rascally!" cried the Chancery prisoner. "But, talking of the Poor-Side puts me in mind of a strange story connected with that quarter of the Bench; and if you have nothing better to do for an hour or so, and will step up to my room—"

"I shall have great pleasure," interrupted Curtis; "for, to tell you the truth, the time does hang rather heavy on my hands;—and till my friends the Marquis of Aldersgate and the Prince of Paris, who is staying in London, come over to see me, I may just as well amuse myself with your story."

Prout accordingly led the way to his room, which was in the front of the building and commanded a view of the parade and racquet-grounds. It was very plainly furnished, but neat and clean; and its owner informed Curtis that he had a married daughter who visited him every day, was very kind to him, and superintended his little domestic concerns.

"But I will not detain you longer than I can help, sir," observed Prout; "and I can promise you that you are about to hear a true tale of deep interest. I have thought of it so often, and have so frequently repeated its details to myself, in the solitude of this chamber, that I am enabled to give you the whole story in a connected form; although it was not in the same continuous manner that the vicissitudes I am about to relate, became known to me. Alas! 'tis a sad—sad tale, sir; but I am afraid that, bad as it is, it still is not the worst that might be told of human nature."

Frank Curtis seated himself opposite to the old man, who, after a short pause, commenced his narrative in the following words.

CHAPTER CVII.

A TALE OF SORROW.

"It was about thirty years ago that a poor but respectable and kind-hearted tradesman, of the name of Craddock, came up from Plymouth to London to receive a hundred pounds which had fallen to him through the death of a relative of whom he had not heard for years until he received the lawyer's letter announcing his decease and the legacy. Craddock was a linen-draper in a very small way at Plymouth: and though industrious, temperate, and obliging, he never had succeeded in doing any thing better than earning a mere living. He was about forty-five years of age at the time of which I am speaking, and had long been married to a woman as generous-souled as himself. They were childless; and, in spite of their poverty, they often regretted that they had no offspring to become the object of their affection, and to comfort them when old age should overtake them. Indeed, it appears that they had seriously thought of adopting some poor person's child: but circumstances of various kinds had opposed this plan; and they at last ceased to converse upon it—endeavouring to render themselves as happy as they could in each other's society. And happy, for that matter, they were too; for the mutual attachment which linked their hearts together, was firmly established; and, as they advanced in years, they seemed to become so necessary to each other, that when Craddock received the lawyer's letter summoning him to London, it was with the greatest difficulty his wife would allow him to set out alone. He however succeeded in making her understand that a hundred pounds did not constitute an independent fortune,—that it was absolutely necessary to carry on the shop,—and that therefore she must remain at home to manage it. Accordingly, the worthy dame tarried at Plymouth, and her husband came up to London by the stage—at that period a journey of no inconsiderable importance.

"It was the first time Mr. Craddock had ever been in the metropolis: but he did not stay a moment longer than his business absolutely compelled him, which was four or five days. The lawyer with whom he had to transact his little affair, was a kind and conscientious man—for there *are* many good lawyers as well as bad ones;—and he hastened the business as much as possible. Accordingly, Mr. Craddock received his money in less than a week; and he instantly went to the Belle Sauvage on Ludgate Hill to take his place home again by the coach. There was only one inside-seat vacant by the stage that was to start in the evening; and Craddock secured it. He then returned to the little lodging where he had slept during his short sojourn in London, and which was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Doctors' Commons. Having packed up his portmanteau, he shouldered it, and was wending his way to the Belle Sauvage, when his attention was drawn to a little boy who was sitting on a door-step in one of the narrow, secluded streets in that district. The child, who was very neatly dressed and about two years old, was crying bitterly. Craddock stopped and spoke kindly to him; and though the boy was too young to give any explanation of the cause of his grief, it was easy to divine that he had strayed from home, or been lost by a negligent servant.



Two or three other persons stopped likewise; and some of the neighbours came out of their houses; but the boy was unknown to them. Craddock tried to console him; but the little fellow wept as if his heart would break. By accident the parish-beadle passed that way, and, on learning what was the matter, said, 'Oh! the best thing I can do, is to take the poor child to the workhouse.'—Now, the mere name of a workhouse was terrible to the ears of the kind-hearted Craddock; and, obeying the impulse of the moment, he exclaimed, 'No, no: not while I have a crust to give him, poor child!'—'Why don't you take him home with you, then?' demanded the beadle: 'the parish will be very glad to be quit of such a bargain as a lost child promises to be.'—'But I live at Plymouth,' returned honest John Craddock.—'Never mind if you live at the devil, so as you agree to take the

child,' persisted the parochial authority.—'Well, I have not the least objection: on the contrary, I shall be delighted to do so,' said Craddock, his eyes filling with tears as the poor boy's grief became more heart-rending. 'I will give you my address; and if your hear any enquiries made by the parents of the child, you can let me know.'—'Very good,' exclaimed the beadle, as he received the card on which John Craddock's name, calling, and abode were printed in bold type. The worthy linendraper then took up the boy in his arms, the beadle consenting to carry the port-manteau; and in this manner they proceeded to the Belle Sauvage, the kind looks, soothing tone, and fond caresses of Craddock having the effect of somewhat diminishing the little fellow's grief.

"The coach was just ready to start; and Crad-

dock took his place, with the child upon his knees. The beadle renewed his promise to write in case he should hear any thing relative to the boy's parents, and the stage rolled out of the old inn yard. It was evening—the shops glared with light; and the scene, as well as the ride in the coach, amused the boy, so that his violent weeping ceased—but frequent sobs agitated his little chest, until at last he fell asleep in worthy John Craddock's arms. It was now for the first time that the linen-draper had leisure to reflect upon the step which he had taken; and it struck him that he had acted imprudently. He was taking away the child from the city to which he most probably belonged, and where he was alone likely to be found by his parents,—taking him away to a far-distant land. But, on the other hand, he remembered the beadle's declaration that the lost child must be conveyed to the workhouse; and he likewise felt certain that should the little creature's parents make proper inquiries concerning their child, the parochial authority would know what explanation to give. Craddock therefore came to the conclusion that he had performed a Christian deed and an Englishman's duty; and, having thus set all scruples at rest, he began to reflect upon the pleasure which his wife would experience in receiving the foundling. For the child was a most interesting one—with curly flaxen hair, sparkling blue eyes, and a sweet complexion; and as he lay sleeping in Craddock's arms, and the lights of the shops in the outskirts of London, which the coach was then traversing, beamed through the window upon the boy's countenance, the worthy linen-draper thought that he had never seen a face so truly cherub-like. But tears came afresh into the worthy man's eyes—for he reflected that an afflicted father and a distracted mother might at that moment be calling upon heaven to restore them their lost child; and, as he bent down and kissed its cool and firm cheeks, on which the traces of weeping still remained, he murmured to himself, 'If thy parents never succeed in recovering thee, my boy, I will be as a father, and I know that my wife will be as a mother to thee!'—The other inside passengers admired the child greatly; but when honest John Craddock told them the story connected with his possession of the boy, they merely hem'd and coughed dryly as if they thought him a very great fool for so burthening himself. Craddock understood what was passing in their minds; and he only hugged the child closer to his bosom.

"During the night, the little fellow frequently awoke, and cried for his papa and mamma; and the good linen-draper was indefatigable in his exertions to console and comfort him—uttering all possible kind things, and purchasing nice cakes for him at the way-side inns. Throughout the following day, too, Craddock was compelled to persevere in this affectionate and conciliatory treatment, which he, however, maintained with a good heart; and as the long, tedious journey of two hundred and sixteen miles drew towards a close, and evening was again drawing on, he had the satisfaction of observing that his little charge seemed to appreciate—or at least to understand his attentions. At last the coach entered the famous sea-port; and in a very short time Craddock was set down at his own door, the stage passing through the street in which he lived. You may suppose that his wife was greatly astonished when she perceived the present that the worthy linen-draper had brought her: but she was not many moments before she took the child in her arms, and covered it with kisses. Then how

the kind-hearted dame wept when Craddock explained to her the manner in which he had become possessed of the boy; and as he spoke she pressed the little being all the closer and all the more fondly to her bosom. The social tea-table was spread, and the servant-girl was sent out to procure some cakes and other nice things for the boy; and then how he was petted and made much of—and how happy the good couple seemed when their attention and caresses were rewarded with smiles!

"Several days passed, during which Craddock received no intelligence from the beadle who had promised to write to him in case of enquiries being instituted respecting the lost child:—weeks elapsed—and still no tidings! The idea—I had almost said the fear—which the worthy couple entertained that they might be compelled to part with the child just as they were getting fond of it, grew gradually fainter and fainter; and at length, when six months had passed and little Alexander (for so they called the boy) had grown not only reconciled to his condition, but appeared to have forgotten that it had ever been otherwise,—by the time six months had passed, I say, Mr. and Mrs. Craddock ceased to contemplate even the chance of being called upon to surrender their charge. Not but that those excellent people would have rejoiced, in one sense, to restore little Alexander to the arms of his parents; but in another sense they could not quench in their secret souls the fond hope that he might be left undisturbedly in their care. Thus time passed on. Craddock's business, which had only required a little capital to give it impetus, exhibited every sign of improvement since the investment therein of the hundred pounds received in London; and Alexander thrived apace.

"I shall now take a leap of twenty years, which brings us up to a date of only ten years ago; and at that time great alterations—but all for the better—had taken place in the circumstances of the Craddocks. Indeed, they had retired from business, having made a considerable fortune, and were settled in a handsome dwelling at a short distance from Plymouth—their native town. Craddock and his wife had, however, descended tolerably far into the vale of life, sixty-five winters having passed over their heads; but in Alexander—now a fine, tall, handsome young man of twenty-two—they had a source of real comfort and happiness. Though acquainted with the circumstance which led to his adoption by Mr. and Mrs. Craddock, and, therefore, knowing well that they were not his real parents, his attachment to them was so great—his affection so sincere—and his gratitude so boundless, that he never once manifested any desire to quit them for the purpose of instituting enquiries relative to his birth. His constant and unwearying endeavour was to show himself deserving of all they had done for him,—the tender care they had taken of him in his infancy—the excellent education they had given him in his boyhood—and the affectionate consideration with which they treated him now that he was grown to man's estate; for in all respects did they regard him as their son, and in this light was he looked upon by their friends and dependants. In fact, nothing was wanting to complete the happiness of Alexander Craddock. He had become enamoured of a beautiful girl, the orphan daughter of an officer in the Navy, and who resided at Plymouth with an old aunt. Lucy Middleton had no fortune, but she possessed the invaluable treasures of amiability of disposition—a sweet temper—a kind heart—and those sterling qualities which

fitted her for domesticity, and gave promise that she would prove an admirable housewife. Alexander loved her, and was loved in return; and his adopted parents gave their consent to the match. Accordingly, one fine spring morning, when the heavens appeared as auspicious as the prospects of the youthful pair, the hands of Alexander Craddock and Lucy Middleton were united, and, after a six weeks' tour in Wales, they returned to Plymouth, to take possession of a commodious and handsome dwelling, which the adopted father of the young man had furnished during their absence for their reception. A year passed away, at the expiration of which Lucy presented her husband with a lovely boy, but almost at the same time the family experienced a severe loss in the death of old Mr. Craddock, who was carried off in a moment by the lightning-stroke of apoplexy. Alexander was dreadfully grieved at this shocking occurrence—a feeling in which his excellent young wife largely shared; but they were compelled to restrain their sorrow as much as possible, in order to console the bereaved widow. Mrs. Craddock was, however, unable to bear up against this heavy affliction: the suddenness of its arrival, and the awful manner in which her husband fell down dead at her feet, when as it were in the midst of a state of perfect health, gave her a shock which she never recovered. She was spirit-broken, and could not rally, in spite of the tender devotion and unwearied attentions shown her by Alexander and Lucy, as well as by the aunt of the latter. Thus was it that in less than six weeks from the sudden demise of Mr. Craddock, his affectionate relict was consigned to the same tomb that held his remains.

"When Alexander had so far recovered himself after experiencing those cruel inroads upon his happiness, as to investigate the affairs of his late adopted parents, he found that he was left sole heir to the handsome fortune acquired by their honest industry; but, though the will and other papers were strictly correct and accurate in all points, he found that certain circumstances connected with his inheritance would compel him to repair to London, and probably retain him in the capital for some weeks. He was not sorry at the idea of quitting Plymouth for a time, his spirits having been deeply affected by the deaths of his adopted parents; and he found Lucy and her aunt, who now lived altogether with them, perfectly agreeable to shift their place of abode. It was accordingly about eight years ago that this family arrived in London, and took a house in a genteel but quiet neighbourhood. Alexander found his income, chiefly derived from funded property, to be seven hundred a-year; and on this he knew that he could live well, but not extravagantly. A natural curiosity—which was the more lively now that he had lost his adopted parents—prompted him to make certain enquiries in the district of Doctors' Commons, with the hope of solving the mystery of his birth. The only intelligence he gleaned, was, that the babe who figured in the opening of the tale, had been dead just twenty-two years: and as Alexander was now twenty-four, he could calculate pretty accurately that the parochial authority alluded to must have been carried off by the hand of the destroyer within a few weeks, if not within even a very few days, from the date when he himself, as a young child, had fallen into the charge of Craddock. Beyond this fact Alexander could ascertain nothing at all calculated to assist in rolling away the veil of mystery which covered his parentage: none of the inhabitants in the street where Craddock had

found him sitting on the door-step remembered any thing of the loss of a child at the period named;—no tradition of the fact remained. Alexander felt somewhat disappointed with these unsuccessful results of his enquiries; but he possessed too many elements of happiness—too many substantial accessories to comfort and mental tranquillity—to remain long affected or dispirited by the apparent permanence of that mystery which enveloped his birth.

"Alexander was naturally of an active disposition, and abhorred a life of idleness. He had been married two years, and was the father of two children; and contemplating the probability of having a numerous offspring, he felt anxious to augment his worldly possessions. 'My adopted father,' he would reason with himself, 'carried on business until a late period of his life, and was happy in the occupation which it afforded him. Why should not I embark in some eligible and safe undertaking which will give me a few hours' employment every day and yield a profit at the same time?' The subject of his musings was communicated to his amiable wife and her aunt; and those ladies joyfully encouraged a spirit so praiseworthy and so indicative of steadiness and prudence. The matter had been under discussion one morning at the breakfast-table, when the daily newspaper was brought in; and an announcement, worded somewhat in this way, met Alexander's eyes.—'ELIGIBLE INVESTMENT.—Any gentleman having a few thousand pounds at his immediate disposal, and desirous to occupy a few leisure hours each day in a highly respectable and advantageous manner, is requested to apply to Edward Walkden, Solicitor, Bush-Lane, Cannon Street.'—Alexander read this advertisement aloud; and the ladies agreed with him that the nature of it was tempting enough to prompt farther enquiry. Accordingly, the young man proceeded in the course of the morning to the address indicated, and found Mr. Walkden's establishment to be large and having every appearance of respectability as well as solidity. Half-a-dozen clerks were busily employed in the front office; and the shelves were covered with japanned tin cases, containing the papers of the most substantial clients. Upon being introduced into the lawyer's private office, Alexander found himself in the presence of a tall man, whose years were upwards of sixty, and whose countenance, once handsome, wore an expression of mingled mournfulness and severity. He was attired in a plain suit of black: his manners were cold and reserved; but there was a business-like air about him and his office, which augmented the good opinion already entertained by Alexander in respect to the lawyer and his establishment.

"Walkden was evidently a man of very few words; and therefore, when Alexander had explained the object of his visit, the information he sought was speedily given. 'I have a client,' said the lawyer, 'who has taken out a patent for a particular purpose, and he requires five or six thousand pounds to work it effectually. The person advancing the amount, will become an equal partner with the patentee, and will find a few hours of pleasant and agreeable occupation daily in superintending the commercial branch of the concern, while the patentee directs the manufacture of the article. There are the papers, sir; take them with you, and read them at your leisure.' Walkden handed the young man a bundle of documents tied round with red tape, and then bowed him out of the office. On his return home, Alexander examined the papers, and was highly do-

lighted with the prospect which they opened to him. He felt convinced that an immense fortune was to be made: the thing was as clear as daylight. The patentee possessed the secret of effecting vast improvements in the manufacture of broad-cloths, which he undertook to produce not only of a superior quality, but likewise at a reduced price. The calculations showed that large returns were certain to follow a comparatively small outlay, and that the business might be extended to a wonderful degree in proportion to the capital advanced to work upon. In a word, the whole affair was of the most roseate hue. Alexander, his wife, and her aunt were in raptures at the brilliant prospect thus fortunately opened to their contemplation; and it was resolved that he should lose no time in securing a share in so prosperous an undertaking. Accordingly, on the following morning, he returned to Mr. Walkden, who received him with cold politeness, and requested his speedy decision in the matter—'as so promising a business had already attracted the notice of several capitalists, who were eager and willing to embark their funds'—'And you will guarantee the respectability of your client, sir?' enquired Alexander.—'I have been established in this profession for upwards of thirty years, young man,' said the lawyer, almost sternly; 'and never have I allowed my office to be made the means of carrying out an illegitimate transaction. My client, Mr. Scudimore, is a man of integrity and honour; and whatever he promises, that will he perform!'—In this case, Mr. Walkden, observed Alexander Craddock, 'the sooner I have an interview with Mr. Scudimore, the better.'—The lawyer made no further observation, but furnished his visitor with the address of the patentee; and Alexander accordingly repaired to Mr. Scudimore's dwelling, which was situated somewhere near Finsbury Square.

"Mr. Scudimore was an elderly person—very well dressed—plausible in his discourse, and over-polite in his manners. In fact, he seemed to be the very reverse of his solicitor in respect to disposition; for he received Alexander as if he had known him all his life; and the young man found himself sitting at lunch and on the best possible terms with his new friend, almost before he had time to look round him. Then, if the affair which thus brought them together, had looked well upon paper, it assumed so glorious an aspect, when described in the glowing language of Mr. Scudimore, that Alexander Craddock, generous, frank, and confiding as he naturally was, came to a complete understanding with the patentee ere he took his departure. On the following day Scudimore dined at his house, and the ladies were quite charmed with their new acquaintance. Matters progressed rapidly through the business-like attention which Walkden devoted to the affair; and in less than a fortnight the deeds of partnership between Alexander Craddock and James Scudimore were duly signed at the lawyer's office, in Bush Lane, Cannon Street. Immediately afterwards, Alexander sold out six thousand pounds, which he paid into a bank to the joint account of Craddock and Scudimore; and in the course of a few days the latter gentleman took his departure for a manufacturing town, where he was to hire premises and establish a factory without delay, Alexander remaining in London to prepare a warehouse to receive the goods. For some months all appeared to go on to the complete satisfaction of both parties. Scudimore wrote up the most pleasing accounts from the country; and at last he in-

formed his young partner that the factory was in perfect readiness to commence operations. It however appeared that more money was required; and Alexander, after an interview with Walkden, threw a further sum of four thousand pounds into the business, all the funds being completely at the disposal of Scudimore. But almost immediately after the advance of this second sum, the letters from the provincial town ceased. Several weeks passed away: no communications were received from Scudimore;—and Mr. Walkden appeared to be as astonished as Alexander himself. A visit to the banker created a vague suspicion in the mind of the young man that all was not right;—for though Scudimore had drawn out the first amount by means of a number of successive cheques, he had received the whole of the second advance on one draught, and almost immediately after it had been paid in. A little further inquiry convinced Alexander that Walkden had presented all the cheques for payment at the bank. Without, however losing a moment by calling on the lawyer for an explanation, Alexander proceeded post-haste to the provincial town where he expected to find Scudimore; and there all his fears were speedily confirmed. No premises had been hired by any such person—no factory established in such a name: but Mr. Scudimore had resided at an hotel in the place for several months, and had taken his departure, no one knew whither, at a date which, on calculation, Alexander found to be precisely four days after he had paid the second sum into the banker's hands. No doubt now remained in his mind that he was the dupe of a designing villain; and he was convinced that Walkden was an accomplice. To London he returned without delay; and, on his arrival, he repaired direct to the lawyer's office. That professional gentleman received him with the usual cold and reserved politeness, affecting not even to notice the excitement under which the young man was labouring.

"Your friend Mr. Scudimore, sir, is a villain!" exclaimed Alexander.—'Such language is intolerable in my office, sir,' said Walkden, in his chilling and phlegmatic manner—'Intolerable or not, it is the only language I can use under such circumstances,' cried the young man. 'Scudimore has absconded with the whole sum of ten thousand pounds which I advanced in this swindling concern; and it was through you and your representations, sir, that I have been thus cruelly deceived and basely plundered.'—'Softly, Mr. Craddock, if you please,' observed the lawyer; 'because your language conveys an imputation which I repel with scorn and contempt. My character is too well established to be injured by the calumny of an obscure stranger. You requested me to give you Mr. Scudimore's address in the first instance: I did so; and it was with him that you made all your arrangements. You then both came to me, informed me that every thing was settled between you, and employed me professionally to draw up certain deeds.'—'But you gave me the highest character of your friend Scudimore!' ejaculated Alexander.—'I spoke of him as I always found him up to that hour when you questioned me,' said Walkden: 'but I never pretended to possess the power of prophesying that he would continue honest up to the day of his death?'—'Contemptible, vile sophistry!' exclaimed Alexander, his cheeks glowing with indignation. 'It is a base conspiracy to plunder me; but I will unmask you!'—'And supposing that I have incurred a chance of losing as much as yourself through this Mr. Scudimore?' said the lawyer, without losing

his temper, but with a smile of malignant triumph on his lips.—‘You lose by him!’ cried Alexander, in a tone of bitter irony; ‘you knew him too well to trust him.’—‘At all events I may have somewhat calculated upon your joint responsibility,’ observed Walkden, fixing his cold, grey eyes upon the young man whom these ominous words startled.—‘What do you mean?’ he demanded, his heart sinking within him.—‘I mean,’ answered Walkden, ‘that I have discounted your acceptances to the amount of eight thousand pounds; that I have passed away those bills of exchange in the course of business; that when they fall due shortly, I shall be unable to take them up; and that the holder will therefore look to you for the payment of them!’—Alexander sank, speechless and powerless, into a seat as the whole scheme of villany was thus fully developed to his horrified contemplation.—‘As you were in partnership, and all the deeds establishing that partnership were drawn up in the regular way and strictly binding, Scudmore had not only a right to sign bills in your joint name,’ proceeded the lawyer, ‘but you cannot for an instant dispute your liability in respect to them.’—‘Is it possible,’ gasped Alexander, ‘that I can have been so foolish and you so wicked? Oh! my poor wife—my beloved children, what will become of you, now that I am ruined by my own madness and this awful combination of villainies?’—‘Mr. Craddock,’ said Walkden, drawing himself up to his full height, while his iron features remained implacable and rigid, ‘you must not allow your tongue a license in respect of me. Again I tell you my character is too well established, and my reputation too substantially good, to be injured by false calumnies. Indeed, I am not at all clear that I have not some grounds to complain of conspiracy and villany: for it certainly looks suspicious—most suspicious that your partner should obtain from me advances to the amount of eight thousand pounds, and then abscond. You would not come out of court with very clean hands, Mr. Craddock, I can tell you’—‘Wretch!’ ejaculated the unhappy young man, now goaded to desperation: ‘how dare you hint at any connivance on my part with the scoundrelism of your own friend—you who presented at the bank all the drafts for the money which I was insane enough to lodge there!’—‘I certainly received several sums on behalf of Mr. Scudmore, to whom I duly remitted them,’ said the lawyer, still in that cold, reserved tone which so much aggravated the rage of the ruined Craddock. ‘But we will now put an end to this interview, sir,’ he added: ‘as my time is precious.’—‘Yes, I will leave you, treacherous miscreant that you are!’ exclaimed Alexander; and rushing into the clerks’ office, he vociferated with mad excitement, ‘Gentlemen, if you wish to behold the greatest villain on the face of the earth, go and look at your master!’—He then hurried away, the victim of a mingled rage and grief which it would be impossible to describe.

“But how could he face his dear wife—her affectionate aunt—his much-loved children? ‘Ruined—totally ruined!’ how awfully do these words sound upon the ears! A man, when alone in the world and with none dependent on him or his exertions, may murmur those words to himself with comparative calmness: but the individual who has a wife and children looking to him for every necessary of existence—ah! he indeed feels his heart seared as with red-hot iron when his lips, expressing the conviction which circumstances force on his startled mind, frame the frightful words, ‘Ruined—totally ruined!’ Miss Middleton (the aunt) and Lucy were already acquainted with

the unpleasant nature of the suspicions which Scudmore’s protracted silence had created in the mind of Alexander: and they were likewise aware of the object of his journey into the country. But they had yet to learn the fatal result of the enquiries he had instituted; and it was still left for him to break to them the particulars of his interview with Walkden. On his return home, his anxiety and mental suffering were betrayed by his countenance,—for he was unskilled in the school of duplicity, and knew not how to conceal a lacerated heart beneath a tranquil exterior. The ladies pressed him with questions. they saw that something dreadful had occurred—and they implored him not to keep them in suspense. He told them all,—told them how Scudmore had plundered him of ten thousand pounds—how he remained liable to Walkden for eight thousand more—and how the payment of this imminent liability would sweep away the whole of his fortune, leaving him a ruined man! Then, in the hour of bitter trial, he found how dear is woman as a ‘ministering angel;’* and, having been comparatively soothed and tranquillised by the consolatory language of his Lucy and Miss Middleton, he proceeded to the office of his own solicitor, whom he resolved to consult relative to the posture of affairs.

“The moment he had left the house, Lucy and Miss Middleton held a hasty council together. ‘Do you think it would be imprudent or improper, my dear aunt,’ asked the young wife, ‘if I were to call upon this Mr. Walkden, and implore him not to press the payment of a debt which will deprive Alexander of all the resources that he might render available for the purpose of retrieving himself?’—‘On the contrary, I approve of the step,’ was the reply. ‘Alexander says that Mr. Walkden was stern and severe; but then Alexander himself may have been hasty and indignant. After all, this Mr. Walkden has perhaps been duped, as well as your husband, by Scudmore.’—‘I fear that this is not the case,’ said Lucy. ‘I am impressed with the conviction that the lawyer and Scudmore were in league together. Nevertheless, as we are entirely at Walkden’s mercy, it would be unwise to irritate, but prudent to conciliate him.’—‘Go, my dear child,’ exclaimed the aunt; ‘and may you succeed in softening the heart of this man who holds your dear husband in his iron grasp.’—Lucy accordingly attired herself in a simple and

* O woman in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made;—
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!

WALTER SCOTT.

And such is woman’s love—the secret power
That turns the darkest to the brightest hour;
That smoothes the wrinkles care has learned to
plough.

And wipes the trace of anguish from the brow!
And oh! in spite of war and wasting pain,
Feelings so noble—so divine remain,
Where were the brighter star to cheer our gloom,
Make heaven of earth, and triumph o’er the tomb.

UNIVERSITY PRIZE POEM.

modest manner, and proceeded to the office of Mr. Walkden, who happened to be disengaged at the time, immediately received her.

"I have called, sir," began Lucy, whose courage almost failed her when she found herself in the presence of a man of such stern, cold, and indeed forbidding aspect—for this was the first time she had ever seen him.—"I have called, sir," she repeated, "on behalf of my husband, whose ruin is certain unless you show him some degree of mercy."—"Mr. Craddock behaved in a manner the most insulting, and dared to utter suspicions the most derogatory to my character, even in the presence of my clerks," observed Walkden, in a tone so chilling that it seemed as if the breath which wafted those words to the young wife's ears, passed over the ice of the poles.—"But surely, sir," urged Lucy, the tears trickling down her cheeks, "you will make some allowances for the excited feelings of a young man just entering into the world as it were, and so cruelly struck on its very threshold by the hand of misfortune? At least, sir, if not for his sake, I implore you for that of his innocent children to be lenient and merciful."—"Law forms and ceremonies are not influenced by such considerations, madam," said Mr. Walkden. "At the same time, I have no objection to search the Commentaries; and if I there find leniency recommended in filing a declaration, or mercy enjoined in signing judgment, I have not the slightest objection to instruct my common-law clerk accordingly."—Lucy stared at the attorney in wild bewilderment and uncertainty as he thus delivered himself in a measured tone of such frigidity that it seemed as if an automaton of ice were speaking; but at length she murmured, "May I then hope, sir, that you will not press for the payment of this heavy debt when the bills become due?"—Walkden fixed his eyes upon the lovely and tearful countenance which was upturned so inapologetically towards him; and the instant he thought within himself that he had never before seen a female face of such surpassing beauty. Then his glance slowly and deliberately wandered from the faultless features to the contour of the well-formed bust, developed even by the plaits of the thick shawl which Lucy wore; and thence his survey was continued until his contemplation had embraced the wasp-like waist, and the flowing outlines of a symmetrical form, terminating in feet and ankles ravishingly modelled.—"You are doubtless much attached to your husband, madam?" he said, his tone becoming the least thing more tender—or rather losing one small degree of its cold severity.—"Attached to him, sir!" exclaimed Lucy, perfectly astonished at the question: "I love—I worship him! He is the best of husbands and the best of fathers!"—"Then you would make any sacrifice to restore him to peace of mind?" said Walkden, his voice becoming more tender still, and his demeanour gradually unbending from his stiff formality.—"Oh! yes," cried the artless Lucy; "any sacrifice would I make to see my Alexander happy as he was wont to be!"—"Any sacrifice," repeated the lawyer, now positively allowing his features to relax into a faint and significant smile, while his voice was lowered and changed into a soft familiarity; "consider what you say—any sacrifice! Well, then, on that condition"—and he took her hand.—A light broke instantaneously upon the mind of Lucy; and, snatching back her hand as if from the maw of a wild beast, she started from her seat, uttered a cry of indignation and abhorrence, and disappeared from the office before

the baffled and disconcerted lawyer had time to make an effort to detain her.

"Lucy's heart was still swelling with mingled resentment and anguish, when she reached her home; and Alexander, who returned at the same time, saw in an instant that she was a prey to no ordinary emotions. Throwing herself into her husband's arms Lucy burst into tears—her pent-up feelings no longer obeying that restraint which she sought to impose upon them. Then, by dint of questioning, Alexander gleaned enough to convince him that his beloved wife had been flagrantly insulted by the villain who had already heaped such grievous wrongs upon his head. Maddened by this fresh injury, Alexander was about to rush from the house and inflict some dreadful chastisement upon the cold-blooded monster Walkden, when his wife and her aunt threw themselves at his feet, and implored him with tears and impassioned entreaties, not to aggravate the perils and embarrassments of his position by involving himself in a quarrel with their enemy. Alexander was moved by the prayers of those whom he loved; and he faithfully promised them not to suffer his indignant feelings to master his prudence. When calmness and composure were somewhat restored, he proceeded to explain the result of the visit which he had just paid to his own solicitor. That gentleman had said to him, 'It is as clear as day-light that you are robbed by Walkden and Scudmore conjointly; but I really do not think that you could prove a conspiracy in a criminal court. I should, however, decidedly advise you to resist the payment of the bills; and, as Walkden is tolerably sure to push the matter on the trial, the verdict of a jury in the civil case will enable us to judge how far we may hope to punish the scoundrel attorney in another manner.' Alexander had accordingly placed himself entirely in his solicitor's hands; and there rested the business for the present.

"But a serious change took place in the disposition and habits of Alexander Craddock. Smarting under the wrongs which he had received, he grew restless and unsettled—experienced less delight than he was wont to feel in the society of his wife and children—showed signs of irritability, and an impatience of the slightest contradiction, however trivial—and remained longer over his wine after dinner. Lucy beheld all this, and wept in secret: but when with Alexander, she redoubled her attentions, and sought every possible opportunity of proving her devotion. She implored him to give up the house they then occupied, and adopt a more economical mode of life; but his answers were evasive—then impatient—and at last so sharp and angry, that she was compelled, though with reluctance, to abandon the topic, at least for the present. To add to Lucy's grief, her aunt, who had so long fulfilled towards her the duties of a mother, was attacked with sudden indisposition, which increased with alarming rapidity, and carried her off in the course of a few days. Alexander manifested far less sorrow than Lucy had expected him to have shown, and this proof of an augmenting callousness on his part, pierced the heart of the amiable young lady to the very quick. But scarcely had the remains of Miss Middleton been consigned to the tomb, when a fresh misfortune occurred to increase the irritability of Alexander. The bills for eight thousand pounds fell due, and were dishonoured by him, in accordance with the advice of his solicitor. He was immediately

after arrested: and as he had resolved to defend the action, he paid into court the whole sum in dispute, a proceeding whereby he could alone save himself from remaining in prison until the trial. He had, however, gone through the ordeal of a spunging-house, and he considered himself disgraced: the irritability of his temper increased—he daily grew more attached to the bottle—and his affections towards his wife and children were evidently blunted. Oh! how ramified and vast are the evil effects of the villany of one man towards another.—striking not only the individual victim, but rebounding and reacting on his wife, his children, and his friends!

"Lucy again revived the expression of her wish that a cheaper dwelling should be taken and a more economical style of living adopted. But Alexander would not listen to the proposal. He declared his certainty of gaining the suit and of recovering his money from the court—a result, he said, which would enable him to employ his funds in some legitimate commercial enterprise. On this subject he spoke so confidently, that Lucy entertained the most sanguine hopes of beholding happiness restored beneath a roof where naught save happiness had once prevailed; and it was with but little apprehension that she marked the arrival of the day fixed for the trial. The most able counsel had been retained on both sides; and the cause excited immense interest. Walkden had been established for years, and bore an excellent character: indeed, none of his friends or clients could for a moment believe that he was an accomplice of the villain Scudmore. The whole question, as presented to the cognizance of the tribunal, was whether Mr. Walkden had given value for the bills, and was a *bona fide* holder of securities which he had legitimately and honourably discounted in the course of business. The evidence he adduced to establish these points was certainly of a nature likely to prove most convincing to a jury, though Alexander knew full well that they were untrue. Walkden had suborned the grossest perjury on the part of his clerks and the other persons whom he put forward as witnesses. Nevertheless, the verdict was in Walkden's favour; and Alexander returned home a prey to the liveliest grief and the most bitter resentment. Lucy did all that woman's goodness and ingenuity could suggest to console him; but the excitement of his feelings gained upon him with such overwhelming violence and rapidity, that he grew delirious, and brain-fever supervened. The best medical advice was procured for him by the almost heart-broken Lucy; but weeks and weeks passed away without enabling the physicians to pronounce him beyond the reach of danger. During that period he had many lucid intervals, on which occasions he recognized his wife and children—embraced them tenderly—wept over them—implored heaven to bless them—and then, in the bitterness of overwhelming reminiscences, desired them to look upon him as one who was dead,—his excitement relapsed into delirium again.

"Poor Lucy! seldom was it that she reposed her aching head upon a pillow, throughout the period of her beloved husband's illness—and never until completely crushed with the fatigue of long vigils and the burthen of a grief beneath which she herself was sinking. At length—just as her pecuniary resources began to fail, and the want of funds excited alarms which augmented her afflictions—Alexander's malady took a sudden turn which filled her mind with the most joyous hope; and when the delirium had altogether

passed away, his manner was so kind and gentle—and his language so endearing and affectionate—and his temper so entirely devoid of irritability, that Lucy's heart became elate with the most cheering aspirations and delightful visions. Alexander spoke of his misfortunes with calmness and resignation, and said, 'Our property is all swept away, dearest; but I am young, and shall soon be strong and active again; and then I will work to obtain a livelihood for us all. And who knows, my beloved Lucy, but that the broad of honest though perhaps severe toil, may not prove the sweetest we shall ever have eaten?'—Then, when his wife had heard him discourse in this manner, she would throw herself into his arms, and thank him—yes, thank him fervently for becoming a consoler in his turn.

"The fond pair had been conversing in this style one afternoon—the first day on which Alexander was enabled to walk down stairs into the parlour without assistance,—and their children were playing in a corner of the apartment, when the door was suddenly and violently thrown open, and two or three coarse-looking fellows unceremoniously made their appearance. Their mission was soon explained. The money paid into court had only just covered the amount of the bills of exchange which had formed the ground of action; and Alexander was now arrested by Walkden for the costs, which had been taxed at a hundred and odd pounds. The unfortunate young couple had not the money, and Lucy had already made away with their plate, jewellery, and other valuables in order to provide her husband with every comfort and luxury in his illness. The furniture was worth more than the amount of the costs, but arrears of rent were due to the landlord.

"Lucy implored the bailiffs, her eyes in tears, not to remove Alexander for a few days, when he might have recovered the shock of this new and unforeseen blow; but they were inexorable, intimating pretty plainly that they were instructed to show no leniency of any kind. She, however, by dint of entreaties—actually going down upon her knees to the officers—succeeded in inducing them to wait while she repaired to his own solicitor. But this gentleman was unable to assist her to the amount she required; he nevertheless manifested the kindest and most respectful sympathy towards her, giving her a few guineas for immediate necessities, and promising to incur the expense of the measures necessary to enable her husband to remove next day from a lock-up house to the King's Bench. It was some consolation to the almost heart-broken young lady, to find that Alexander possessed at least one friend in the world; but even this faint and poor gleam of solace vanished, and gave way to the keenest apprehensions, when on her return she found her husband a prey to all that fearful excitement which had proved the forerunner of his late dangerous malady.

"What was to be done? There seemed but one alternative; and this she was determined, in her affectionate solicitude and zeal, to adopt without the knowledge of Alexander. Indeed, he scarcely appeared to be aware of what was going on; but raved, talked wildly, and menaced and wept by turns in the presence of the officers who surrounded him. Away sped Lucy to Bush Lane; and a second time did she enter the establishment of that individual who had brought such rapid—such signal—such unredeemable ruin on the heads of a once happy family. Walkden received her in his private office, and

coldly desired her to be seated, a smile of infernal triumph relaxing his stern and unusually rigid features; while his eyes scanned the wasted but still touchingly beautiful and deeply interesting countenance of that afflicted young lady. Lucy was for some minutes so overcome by the intensity of her feelings, that she was unable to utter a word; and when she did speak, it was a mere grasping forth of disjointed sentences, broken by frequent sobs of convulsing agony. The lawyer bent over her like Satan whispering to a desperate creature the terms on which wealth and power might be purchased,—bent over that crushed, much-enduring, and amiable young wife, and murmured in her ears *his* terms of mercy towards her husband. She rose and looked at him in amazement and horror. Was he a human being, or a veritable fiend? His cold, grey eyes sank not beneath the reproachful and indignant glance of that outraged lady; and a smile of demoniac triumph again played upon his lip. Doubtless he thought that her anger was only momentary, and that the sternness of necessity would force her to a compliance with his will. But he knew not the mind of Lucy. "Villain! monster!" she exclaimed; "has your infamy no bounds?" and she fled from the presence of the cold-blooded scoundrel as if the atmosphere which he breathed were fraught with the plague.

"With a heavy heart did she return home—that home from which her husband must now be dragged immediately and before her eyes,—a home which, perhaps, would not long remain so for herself and children. But suddenly, and as if by divine inspiration, she remembered that all her courage was now required to enable her to bear up against her afflictions for the sake of Alexander—for the sake of her offspring;—and it is astonishing how, in the midst of the deepest sorrows, woman can often display an energy of which the stronger sex is altogether incapable.

"And so it was now with Lucy Craddock. She even succeeded in comforting her husband and soothing his excitement, by reminding him that the more he appeared to be crushed, the greater would be the delight of his savage and unrelenting enemy. This species of remonstrance, so kindly—so gently administered, had the desired effect; and Alexander, animated with a spirit of endurance, and fortified by the example of his admirable wife, rose if possible superior to his misfortunes, and proceeded with a feeling of proud resignation to the lock-up-house. Thence on the ensuing day he was removed to King's Bench; and it was here that I first formed his acquaintance, when he entered the prison six years ago.

"Immediately after his arrival, his spirits gave way rapidly, and it was necessary for his wife to take up her abode with him altogether. She accordingly disposed of the furniture in their house, paid the landlord and the few other small creditors, and brought her children over to the small cheerless chamber in which her husband was lying on a bed of sickness. Thus was this once happy family—like so many, many others, reduced from a state of comfort, and even affluence, to poverty and a prison-room. Heaven only knows what misery—what privations they had undergone, when it was first whispered to me by a char-woman that the Craddocks seemed to be in great distress. I was then a little better off than I am now; and I immediately repaired to their room, inventing some excuse for my intrusion. Oh! what a scene of destitution—what

heart-rending spectacle met my eyes! The furniture which the Craddocks had hired, had been all removed away in consequence of their inability to pay for its use: Alexander, pale and emaciated, was sitting upon a trunk; the two children, thin and wasted, were crying for food; and the poor, heart-rent Lucy was looking over a few things in a hat-box, evidently with a view to select the most likely articles to be received by the pawnbroker—while her scalding tears fell fast upon her hands as she turned over the only relics left of a wardrobe once extensive and elegant. It went to my very soul to contemplate that scene! I shall not pause to explain all the particulars which rendered me intimate with the Craddocks: suffice it to say, that they accepted my assistance, and then in a few hours their chamber once again wore an aspect of such comfort as the restitution of furniture and a well supplied table could possibly afford in a prison. I did not learn their history immediately—not all its details at once: portions of it were communicated by degrees—some of the particulars oozed out incidentally—and the feelings and sentiments experienced by the sufferers in their various phases of their eventful tale, transpired from time to time,—until at length I gleaned all those facts which I have now related to you. But by far the most terrible portion of the history of the Craddocks is yet to come."

Prout paused for a few moments, and then inquired of Frank Curtis if he were wearied of the narrative. The young gentleman assured him that, so far from being tired of the story, he was deeply interested in its progress; whereupon the Chancery prisoner proceeded in the following manner.

CHAPTER CVIII.

CONCLUSION OF THE TALE OF SORROW.

"ALTHOUGH I was enabled to administer temporary assistance to this unfortunate and persecuted family, and, under the delicate guise of a loan of money, gave them the wherewith to make themselves comparatively comfortable, it was nevertheless necessary for Alexander to resolve upon some decisive step. To remain in prison was to bury his talents in a manner so as to render them completely unavailable,—to think of liquidating the enormous burthen of debt which lay upon his shoulders, was ridiculous,—and to move the stony heart of Walkden was a hopeless idea. The only alternative was the Insolvents' Court. Good food, medical attendance, and the altered appearance of his wife and children, who had improved greatly, restored Alexander to some degree of health and spirits; and he soon began to discuss with me and Lucy his present position and plans for the future. The lawyer who had enabled him to pass over to the Bench, returned to town at this precise period, after some weeks' absence; and he not only agreed to provide the funds to take Alexander through the Insolvents' Court, but also promised to give him employment as a clerk on his release. Thus was it that this good man infused hope into the bosoms of



the Craddocks; and the necessary steps were adopted to effect the emancipation of the prisoner. But scarcely were the initiatory proceedings set on foot, when intelligence was received to the effect that Walkden was resolved to oppose Alexander's discharge by all the means that were within his power. This intimation, which reached the prison through a private channel, aroused Alexander's fury against the man who so unrelentingly persecuted him; and it required all the attentions of his amiable wife and all the manifestations of friendship which I was enabled to offer, to restore him to comparative tranquillity.

"Well, the day fixed for his examination at the Insolvents' Court arrived; and Alexander proceeded thither in the usual charge of a tipstaff. His case was called on at an early stage of the day's business, and he found a formidable array of counsel employed against him. I shall not pause to dwell upon all the details of the proceeding: suffice it to say that Walkden was placed in the witness-box, and, being examined by the barristers whom he had feed, made the entire case look so tearfully black against Alexander Craddock, that he was remanded to gaol for twelve months, his discharge to take place at the

expiration of that period. Fearful was the state of excitement in which he returned to the Bench; and in the course of a few hours he was delirious. It was frightful to hear his ravings, in which the name of Walkden was uppermost, and associated with the bitterest imprecations and menaces. Poor Lucy! I thought her heart would break, as she sat watching by her husband's bed, but she was rewarded to some extent for her vigils and her sorrow, when, on the return of his senses, he recognised her before he even knew his own children, much less me—his humble friend,—and manifested his purest love for her in the most impassioned language and with the tenderest embraces. But though the delirium left him and returned no more, he soon fell into a deep and brooding melancholy, from which it was scarcely possible to arouse him. He fancied himself dishonoured—permanently dishonoured by the sentence passed upon him by the Insolvents' Court; and though the friendly lawyer and myself, as well as Lucy, endeavoured to reason with him against the belief,—pointing out every circumstance calculated to prove that he was a victim, and not a culprit,—he took the matter so to heart that it was evident his spirit was broken!

"My own resources began to fall off at this period, and I was unable to assist the Craddockes as much as I could wish. Moreover, Alexander and Lucy both felt averse to remain dependant upon me; and the friendly lawyer had proved so generous that they were naturally delicate in applying to him. Lucy accordingly made up her mind how to act. She proposed that they should remove over to the Poor-Side, and receive the County money. They would thus obtain a room rent free, and a few shillings a-week to purchase bread. Alexander's pride struggled against this project; but he yielded at last to the entreaties and representations of his excellent wife, who assured him that she felt no shame in showing that she was poor, and that the only real disgrace lay in dishonesty. 'Wherefore, then, should we contract any debts which we cannot pay?' she enquired; 'and if we continue to live in this part of the prison we must keep up certain appearances, which we have not the means to do.'—Alexander succumbed, I say, to this reasoning; and to the Poor-Side they accordingly removed. I never shall forget the day when this change took place. Lucy had made the new chamber look as neat as possible; and she endeavoured to maintain a smiling exterior as she arranged the little furniture and the few things of their own which were left to them. But every now and then she glanced anxiously towards her husband, who sat in a musing—or rather an apathetic manner—watching her proceedings; and I observed that a tear frequently started to her eye, and that every now and then she caught up her children and pressed them passionately to her bosom. I insisted upon providing dinner on that day; and I did all I could not only to make this poor family as comfortable as possible, but also to raise Alexander's spirits. But if he smiled it was so faintly, or sickly, that my heart sank within me as if he had been my own son.

"A few weeks passed away, and I observed that Lucy managed to keep the family pretty comfortably. They had no lack of plain and humble food—and the children were always neat and clean. Whenever I called at their room, I found Lucy busy in some way or another—either washing or mending the clothes, or ironing out her husband's linen, or else plying the needle at work which, though I know little of such matters, did not seem to me to have any reference to the family wardrobe at all. One night I could not sleep, and got up to take a walk round the prison. It was between twelve and one; and, as I passed round by the Poor-Side, I chanced to look up at the window of the Craddockes' room. To my surprise, I observed a light burning; and the truth flashed upon me. Poor Lucy was sitting up to work—to waste her youth, her health, and her spirits over the needle, that she might obtain the means to purchase comforts for her husband and children! The conviction went to my very heart like a pang; and I thought how bitter is often the mission of a good and virtuous woman in this world! I remember that I had no inclination to retire to rest again that night; and I kept walking—walking round the prison, impelled by some invincible influence thus to wander about the gloomy place, as if to watch how long the feeble light would be burning in that one room! It was nearly four o'clock when that light was extinguished; and I heard a sigh as I murmured to myself the name of poor Lucy Craddock! When day came, and I was

enabled to call upon Alexander after breakfast, I examined the young wife and mother with more attention than usual: and it then struck me that she was visibly wasting away. Her health was evidently declining; and her spirits were entirely forced. She was gay and lively as ever; but that gaiety and liveliness were assumed, not real—artificial, not natural,—the veil which an excellent and amiable woman—a most affectionate wife and the best of mothers—put on to cover the secret of her breaking heart!

"Three months of the year for which Alexander had been remanded, passed away; and Lucy beheld her children drooping and pining through want of proper air and exercise. This discovery was a new affliction. She would not permit the little things to play about along with the ragged, dirty offspring of the other prisoners on the Poor-Side; and she was unable to spare the time to take them out herself. I understood the struggle that was passing in her mind. If she devoted an hour or two each day to them, she must give up some of the work which, as I found out, she had obtained from a warehouse in the Borough; and by so doing their comforts and those of her husband would be abridged. On the other hand, she could not see those poor innocents confined to a close room and pining for fresh air. She accordingly resolved to take them out for a certain period each day, and to steal another hour or two from her repose. I knew that she did this, because when I either walked about until very late, or else rose early to take my ramble about the prison, I saw the light in the chamber even at five o'clock in the morning! My God! it is as true as I am here, that this poor, devoted woman at length limited herself to only three hours' rest; and though her children improved in health, her own was suffering the most frightful ravages. It was evident that Alexander did not suspect the labour and toil which his wife endured: he had sunk into a species of apathy which blinded him to a fact that I discovered so easily, and which gave me the acutest pain. You may be sure that I did all I could for the family, and in as delicate a way as possible,—always proposing to join my dinner to their's when I knew that I had a better one than they; but my own resources were becoming daily more cramped; and my accursed Chancery business not only lingered on, but absorbed all the funds I could raise or my friends could muster in my behalf. Thus six months passed away—Lucy in the meantime being worn down to a skeleton, and seeming only the shadow of her former self. Still she grew not slovenly: dirt—that too frequent companion of poverty—was not the characteristic of her little chamber; and her husband always had his clean shirt for the Sabbath, and even decent apparel, considering that he lived on the Poor-Side of the King's Bench Prison!

"It was Term Time; and my business compelled me to take a day-rule. That is to say, I obtained permission to go out for a day to attend to my affairs, my friends giving security to the Marshal of the Bench for my safe return. I resolved to avail myself of this opportunity to call on Walkden, and represent to him the cruelty and absurdity of keeping Alexander in confinement, when by withdrawing the detainee he might restore him to freedom. I was prepared to find Walkden a severe and hard man; but the reception I experienced was cal

culated to make me set him down as a fiend in mortal shape. The moment I mentioned my business, he stopped me short,—rising from his seat, and saying in a cold, icy manner, 'The name of Craddock is abhorrent to me, sir. I was grossly insulted by his injurious suspicions; and he shall rot in prison before I permit him to escape my vengeance. He thinks that he will be freed in six months' time; but he is mistaken.'—'No, sir,' I exclaimed indignantly, 'it is you who are mistaken. The fiat of the Insolvents' Court is stronger than your vindictive will.'—'We shall see,' observed Walkden, in an implacable tone; and I was compelled to withdraw, not only grieved at the ill-success of my visit, but filled with vague apprehensions that fresh persecutions were in waiting for my unhappy friend. But I did not breathe a word to either Alexander or Lucy relative to the step which I had taken nor the fears thus excited within me; although I could not banish the lawyer's dark menace from my thoughts. Months passed away—Lucy still managing to keep the wolf from the door, as the vulgar phrase goes; while her health was sinking rapidly.

"At length the period drew nigh when Alexander expected to obtain his deliverance; and now his spirits began to rise. He gradually shook off the apathy which had so long clouded his intellect and impaired his energies; and he spoke highly of the prospect of release. But Walkden watched him from a distance, and seemed to gloat over the new scheme of vengeance which he had in store for this hapless family. Indeed, the blow came on a day when Alexander had declared to me that he had not felt his heart so light for a long, long time. A detainer was lodged against him at the gate—a detainer for a thousand pounds! The fact was that a mistake had been committed in Alexander's schedule, and an item to that extent omitted. The judgment of the Court was therefore void and null in respect to a debt not inserted in the schedule; for such is the atrocious law, made on purpose to persecute those unfortunate debtors who do not come within the meaning of the Acts which enable traders to apply to the Bankruptcy Court. The way that I heard first of the detainer being lodged at Walkden's suit was in this wise:—A char-woman came to my room, saying that Mrs. Craddock, who appeared to be in great distress of mind, wished to see me immediately. I hurried to the Poor-Side, a misgiving preparing my mind to receive intelligence of farther persecution on the part of the fiend Walkden. On entering the Craddocks' chamber, I found Alexander lying almost senseless on the bed, deep and prolonged gaspings alone denoting that he was alive. Lucy was on her knees, imploring him not to give way to despair; and the children were crying piteously, although they were too young to understand the nature of the misfortune which had fallen on their parents' heads. I strove to awaken my unhappy friend to the necessity of enduring this new affliction with courage; and in a short time my representations, joined to Lucy's prayers and entreaties, succeeded to some little extent. 'You must petition the Insolvents' Court again,' I said; 'and you are sure of having no farther remand. In six weeks you will be free.'—'But the means—the means to pass this ordeal a second time!' he exclaimed almost frantically.—'The Marshal has some charitable funds at his disposal,' I observed; 'and I will instantly wait upon him, and represent the

whole circumstances of the case.'—Alexander was in that feverish state of excitement which cannot endure suspense when any gleam of hope is afforded in the midst of despair; and he urged me to lose no time in seeing the Marshal. As I quitted the room, Lucy pressed my hand in a manner expressive of deep emotion, as she murmured in a low tone, 'You are our only friend!'

"Within ten minutes I was seated in the Marshal's private office, explaining the nature of my business. I unreservedly and frankly revealed to him Alexander Craddock's whole history; and you may be sure that I did not forget to dwell upon the admirable conduct of Lucy. The Marshal is a humane man, although nothing more than a superior kind of gaoler; and he listened to me with great interest. When I had concluded my narrative, which was rather long, he said, 'Mr. Piout, I will lose no time in calling myself upon Mr. Walkden, whom I know well by name, and whose character has certainly appeared to me this day in a new light. I am well aware that he is harsh and severe; but I do not think him capable of keeping this man in prison under all the circumstances which you have detailed to me. I will see him, and endeavour to excite his compassion by unfolding to him all the particulars of Craddock's history, as you have now related them to me. If he should persist in retaining him in gaol, I will then from my own pocket advance the necessary funds to enable your poor friend to petition the Court again. In the meantime give Craddock this guinea.'—I returned my warmest thanks to the Marshal for his goodness, and was hurrying back to the Craddocks with the money and the hopeful intelligence I had in store for them, when, as I passed through the upper lobby, my attention was directed to a new prisoner who had just arrived; for on the turnkey asking him his name, he replied—SCUDIMORE! A moment's scrutiny of the man convinced me that he was the same who had plundered Craddock, a description of his personal appearance having been frequently given to me by Alexander. I was sorry to find that he had become an inmate of the same place as the individual whom he had so deeply injured, and whose excited feelings I feared might lead him to some act of violence towards the villain. Well aware that Alexander could not be long before he must inevitably learn the fact of Scudimore's arrest, I resolved to mention it to him without delay, so as to prepare him to meet his enemy within the precincts of the Bench. I, however, communicated my good news first; and Lucy was overjoyed when she learnt that the Marshal had resolved to interest himself in her husband's behalf. But Alexander's manner suddenly became so strange—so unaccountably sombre and gloomy—and so menacingly mysterious, when I revealed to him the circumstance of Scudimore's presence in the prison, that both Lucy and myself grew terribly alarmed. We implored him not to notice Scudimore even when they should meet; but he gave no reply. I, however, whispered to Lucy my hopes that the Marshal would succeed in inducing Walkden to liberate her husband at once; and thereby remove her husband from the vicinity of the scoundrel who had ruined him. I also resolved to be as much with Alexander as possible; and I was delighted to find that he showed no inclination to leave his room for the purpose of taking his usual walk up and down the back of the prison-building.

"In the course of a couple of hours the Marshal sent me in word that he had not succeeded in finding Mr. Walkden at his office, but had made an appointment with the head-clerk to call again in the evening, when the result of his interview with the lawyer should be immediately communicated to me, even if the gates were closed. I therefore saw that the Marshal was in earnest in carrying out the business he had taken in hand; and Lucy was inspired with the same strong hopes that I entertained. But Alexander received the Marshal's message with an apathetic coldness which filled me with alarm; and it was evident that his mind brooded over other affairs, which I could not help thinking were connected with the arrival of Scudimore at the Bench. I was, however, glad to observe that Lucy did not participate in my fears to the same extent as she did in my hopes: poor creature! the thought of seeing her husband soon free was the absorbing sentiment in her mind! I remained with the Craddockes on that eventful day up to almost nine o'clock, when a letter which I received by the last post compelled me to go to my room for a few minutes to look out a few papers connected with my own case, and which my attorney required the first thing in the morning. I assured Lucy that I would return as soon as possible, the promised intelligence from the Marshal being now every moment expected by us.

"And now I come to a frightful portion of my sad tale. I had been about five minutes in my room, and had just sealed up the packet which was to be given to a messenger that night to deliver early next day to my solicitor, when Lucy rushed in without knocking. She fell exhausted upon the floor; and it was some moments before she could articulate a word. I was cruelly alarmed; and my hand trembled so as I poured her out some water that I could scarcely hold the glass. At length I learnt that Alexander had suddenly started from his chair, a minute after I left him, and seizing a knife, had rushed from the room. Before Lucy could reach the bottom of the stairs, he had disappeared; and, in a state bordering on distraction, she had naturally flown to me. While she was gasping forth the few words which thus made me acquainted with the cause of her visit, cries of horror suddenly burst from the parade-ground and struck upon our ears. I cannot at this moment remember what we thought, or what we said;—no, nor how we got down the stairs: the next incident that I do recollect, after hearing those appalling cries, was finding myself elbowing my way through a group of prisoners assembled on the parade; and then, by the moon-light, what a spectacle met my eyes! A man was lying on the ground, weltering in his blood; and another was passive and motionless in the grasp of three or four prisoners. The former was Scudimore: the latter was Alexander Craddock. Then female shrieks of anguish rent the air; and Lucy threw herself wildly into her husband's arms, exclaiming in a tone so piercing that it still rings in my ears—'You did not do it, Alexander! Oh! no—you could not—you would not! Tell me—I conjure you,—tell me that you did not do it!'

"Almost at the same moment a cry was raised of—'The Marshal!'—and immediately afterwards that gentleman came up to the spot, accompanied by another individual, whom, as the moon-light fell upon his countenance, I instantly recognised to be Walkden. And that countenance—how was it

changed! No longer cold and implacable, every feature bore the imprint of ineffable anguish and black despair. Then, when in a few hurried words, the assassination of Scudimore was communicated by the bye-standers to the Marshal and Walkden, and Alexander Craddock was mentioned as the murderer, a scene of the most wildly exciting interest ensued. For Walkden sprang towards the guilty—unhappy young man, and throwing his arms frantically around him,—poor Lucy shrinking back at his appearance,—exclaimed, 'My son!—my dear, and long-lost son! Pardon me—pardon me—I am the cause of all this—Oh! my God! how fightfully am I punished!'—and the wretched Walkden fell heavily upon the ground, overpowered—stunned—crushed by emotions too awful to be even conceived!

"I must here pause for a few moments to give a word or two of necessary explanation. The Marshal had found Mr. Walkden at his office in the evening, and had begged him to grant Alexander's release. But the miscreant was inexorable, alleging that he had received at the prisoner's hands insults of a nature which rendered mercy impossible. The Marshal, hoping to touch the man's heart by a recital of all the interesting circumstances of Alexander's life, began to tell his story; but scarcely had he explained how Alexander had been found by the late Mr. Craddock in the neighbourhood of Doctors' Commons, when Walkden's whole manner suddenly underwent an appalling change: he turned ghastly pale—trembled like an aspen-leaf—and then, in another minute, covered his face with his hands, exclaiming in a tone of the deepest anguish, '*Merciful God! it is my own son whom I have plundered and persecuted thus vilely! Oh! wretch that I am—miscreant, demon that I have been!*'—The Marshal was naturally overwhelmed with astonishment at these terrific self-accusations, which nevertheless appeared to be too well founded; for it was indeed the only child of the miserable lawyer who had been lost by a neglectful servant years ago in the neighbourhood of Doctors' Commons; and the sudden death of the beadle happening the very next day, had destroyed the only clue to the infant. Mrs. Walkden died of a broken heart; and it was most probably these misfortunes which, acting upon a morbid mind, rendered the attorney the harsh, severe, merciless man which he had so effectually proved himself to be.

"And what miseries had he piled up, to fall on his own head! He had ruined his son—rendered him a murderer—and also endeavoured to seduce that son's wife. Oh! it was a fearful scene which took place on the parade-ground on that eventful evening. Scudimore lay a corpse at the feet of the man whom he had injured; and senseless by the side of the corpse, fell Walkden who had made Scudimore his instrument and accomplice in the iniquitous transaction which paved the way for this accumulation of horrors. Alexander understood nothing that took place. He saw it all—but comprehended it not. His reason had fled; and it is most probable that he was already a maniac when he rushed from his room armed with the fatal knife—and perhaps even when I observed the strange change come over him on his learning from my lips that Scudimore was an inmate of the Bench. As for Lucy—poor, crushed, heart-broken Lucy—she had fainted when Walkden proclaimed himself her husband's father! But I must hasten and bring you

story to a conclusion. The Marshal speedily gave the orders necessary under the circumstances which had occurred; and, on Lucy being recovered from her swoon, she found that she had not been the prey of a hideous dream, as she at first supposed—but that her husband had been taken from her, and lodged in the strong-room—a maniac and a murderer! Oh! what a heart-rending duty it was for me to implore her to take courage for her children's sake! Walkden, who had in the meantime been restored to his senses, begged her to make his house her home in future, and look on him as a father;—but she shrieked forth a negative in so wild a tone, and accompanied by such a shudder, that the wretched man could not be otherwise than deeply convinced how ineffable was the abhorrence that she entertained for him. The Marshal kindly took charge of the stricken woman and her young children; and the corpse of Scudmore was conveyed to a room, there to await the attendance of the Coroner on the following day.

“But little more remains to be told. During the night that followed the deplorable events which I have just related, Alexander Craddock grew furious with excitement, and became raving mad. A brain-fever supervened; and in less than twelve hours from the moment when his hand avenged his wrongs on the villain Scudmore, he himself was no longer a denizen of this world! Ten days afterwards the Marshal received a letter from Walkden, which he subsequently showed to me, and the contents of which ran thus as nearly as I can recollect them:—‘*I am about to quit England, and shall never be again heard of by one who has so much reason to shudder at the mere mention of my name. I allude to my deeply-injured daughter-in-law. My share of the ten thousand pounds, of which Scudmore plundered her husband, was precisely one half. This amount, with compound interest, I have placed in the funds in her name; and I implore her to forgive a man who is crushed and heart-broken, and who loathes himself.*’—Lucy, who had only for her children's sake been able to sustain anything like the adequate amount of courage necessary to support her afflictions, was somewhat solaced—if solace there could be in the midst of such bitter, bitter woe—by the certainty that those children were now secure against want. She accordingly removed with them into a small but comfortable dwelling near Norwood—but not before she had called on me, to express all her gratitude for the kindnesses which I had been enabled to show the family. She moreover endeavoured to compel me to receive a sum of money, as she said in repayment for the amounts I had at various times lent them; but that sum was a hundred times greater than any I had ever been able to assist them with. I would not receive a fraction; and I wept on parting with her, as if she had been my own daughter. During the year which she survived the loss of her husband—for she only *did* survive it a year—she came frequently to visit me, always accompanied by her children; and on every occasion she brought me some touching and delicate memorial of her esteem. But her health had been undermined by the long vigils—the deep anxieties—the corroding cares—the serious toils—and the frightful shocks, which had characterised her existence in this accursed prison; and she died in the arms of an affectionate female friend, who dwelt in her neighbourhood, and whose bosom her misfor-

tunes had deeply touched. This friend promised to be a second mother to the poor children; and she has fulfilled her word. Two respectable gentlemen accepted the guardianship of the orphans, so far as their pecuniary interests are concerned; and those orphans will be rich when they become of age,—for Walkden died a short time ago, leaving them all his fortune. Poor Lucy sleeps in the same grave with her husband; and thus ends my *TALE OF SORROW.*”

The old man wiped away the tears from his eyes; and Frank Curtis was not only deeply interested in the narrative which he had just heard, but even affected by its lamentable details, on which he was about to make some remark, when, happening to glance from the window, he espied the captain on the parade staring about him in all possible directions. Curtis therefore took leave of Mr. Prout, after thanking him for the recital of the melancholy tale, and hastened to join his friend.

Captain O'Blunderbuss had no good news to relate. The officers in possession in Baker Street had positively refused to allow Mrs. Curtis to take any thing, beyond wearing apparel, away with her; and the excellent lady had accordingly moved, with her two trunks and her five children, to a lodging in Belvidere Place.

The captain had likewise been unsuccessful in his visit to Sir Christopher Blunt. He had seen the knight, it is true; but neither menaces nor coaxings had proved potent enough to induce that gentleman to draw forth his purse or sign his autograph to a cheque.

“What the devil, then, must I do?” demanded Frank Curtis, shuddering as he thought of the Poor-Side.

“Be Jاسus! and go dacently and genteelly through the Insolvents' Court,” exclaimed the captain; “and I'll skin the Commissioners alive if they dar- to turn you back, my frind!”

“I really think there is no other alternative left but to petition the Court,” observed Frank Curtis “and therefore I'll make up my mind at once to do so.”

CHAPTER CIX.

THE PRISONERS.

WE must leave Mr. Frank Curtis to adopt the necessary measures in order to effect his emancipation from the Bench *via* the Insolvents' Court, and suppose that a month has passed since the period when the Blackamoor consigned to his dungeons Tim the Snammer, Josh Pedler, Old Death, Mrs. Bunce, her husband, and Tidmarsh.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, when the Blackamoor, attended by Cæsar, who bore a light, entered the subterranean passage containing the doors of the cells in which the prisoners were separately retained. Wilton followed, bearing a large basket; and two more of the Black's retainers brought up the rear, one carrying a naked cutlass and the other a pair of loaded pistols in their hands.

Opening the door of the first cell, the Blackamoor took the light from Cæsar's hand, and stopping on the threshold, said, “Timothy Splint, another sun has set, and the close of another day has come. Had you been surrendered up to the justice of the

criminal tribunals of your country, you would ere this have ceased to exist: your guilt would have been expiated on the scaffold."

"Oh! I would rather it had been *that*," exclaimed the man, in a tone which carried to the hearts of his listeners a conviction of his sincerity,—"I would rather it had been *that*, than this frightful lingering in utter darkness! The light, sir, is as welcome to me as food would be if I was starving," he added with profound emphasis.

"Are you afraid to be alone and in the dark?" enquired the Blackamoor.

"It is hell upon earth, sir!" cried Tim the Snammer. "What! can you ask me whether I'm afraid, when the place is haunted with dreadful spectres?"

"The spectres are created by your own guilty conscience," answered the Black, mildly but solemnly: then, advancing farther into the dungeon, so that the light fell upon the haggard countenance of the prisoner, he said, "You see that there are no horrible apparitions now; and why should they not remain here when you can enjoy the use of your eyes as well as when you are involved in darkness?"

"That is what I say to myself—that is what I am always asking myself," exclaimed Timothy Splint. "And yet I can't help thinking that *he* is there—the murdered man, you know—with his throat so horribly cut—Oh! yes—when I am alone and in the dark, I am sure he is there—*just as you are*—standing now. He never moves—he stands as still as death—and his eyes glare upon me in the dark. It is dreadful—dreadful!"—and the wretched criminal hid his face in his hands.

"Are you sorry, then, that you killed Sir Henry Courtenay?" asked the Black.

"Sorry!" repeated Splint, in a thrilling—agonising tone. "I wish that I could only live the last few months over again! I'd sooner beg—go to the workhouse—break stones in the road—or even starve, than rob or do any thing wrong again! Oh! I would indeed! For I see now that though a man may only mean for to rob, he stands the chance of taking away life; and it's a horrid—horrid thing to say to one's self, '*I am a murderer*.' But it's more horrid still to see the dreadful spectre always standing by one—quite plain, though in the dark—and never taking his cold eyes off his assassin."

"If you had a light, Timothy Splint, you would no longer think of your crimes," said the Blackamoor; "and then you would be ready to fall back into your old courses, if you had your liberty given to you once more."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the man, his frame convulsed with a horrible shudder. "I wish I had never known such courses at all: I wish I could live over again during the whole period that I've been so wicked. I am sure I should be a good man then—if so be I had all my experience to teach me to be so. I never thought it was such a shocking thing to be wicked till I came to be left alone in darkness—yes, all alone with my frightful thoughts! I would sooner be put to death at once; but—but—" he added, in a hesitating manner—"I have n't the courage to brain myself against the wall, because the spectre of the murdered baronet seems to stand by to prevent me."

"And have you, then, ever thought of suicide, since you first became a prisoner here?" enquired the Blackamoor.

"Often and often, sir—very often," exclaimed Splint, emphatically.

"You never told me this before; and yet I have visited you regularly every evening to bring you food and talk to you for a short time," said the Blackamoor.

"But you never spoke to me so kindly as you do now, sir," cried the criminal, earnestly; "and when a man has been upwards of thirty days—yes, I have counted your visits, and this is the thirty-first,—when a man, I say, has been thirty-one days all alone and in darkness, except for a few minutes every evening, he begins to feel the want of hearing a human voice—and when that voice speaks in a kind manner—"

Timothy Splint's tone had gradually become tremulous; and now he burst into tears. Yes—the villain—the robber—the murderer wept; and those were tears such as he had not shed for a long, long time!

When the river is ice-bound by the cold hand of winter it seems unconscious of the presence of the flower thrown on its impenetrable surface; but when thawed by the warm sun, and flowing naturally again, the stream opens its bosom to receive the rose-bud which it caresses with its sparkling ripples, and wafts gently along as if rejoiced at the companionship. So was it with the heart of this man; and the slightest word spoken in a kind manner was now borne on by the current of feelings thawed from a state of dull and long-enduring obduracy.

"Your crimes are manifold and great," said the Blackamoor; "but there is hope for even the vilest," he added, unable altogether to subdue a profound sigh; "and contrition is all that remains for sinful mortals, who cannot recall the past."

"I am penitent, sir—I am very penitent, I can assure you," exclaimed the man, in a tone of deep emotion. "A few weeks ago I should have been ashamed to utter such a thing; and now it does me good to say so.—And I'll tell you something more, sir," he continued, after a moment's hesitation; "though I suppose you will not believe me—"

"Speak frankly," said the Blackamoor.

"Well, sir—I have tried to recollect a prayer; and last night when I repeated it, I thought that the spectre gradually grew less and less plain to the view, and at all events seemed less horrible. I was praying again when you came just now—and I shall pray presently—for I know that there is some consolation in it."

"You do well to pray, Timothy," observed the Blackamoor. "Would you not like to be able to read some book?"

"If I only had a candle and a Bible, sir," exclaimed the man, speaking under the influence of feelings deeply excited but unquestionably sincere, "I think I should even yet be happy in this dreadful dungeon."

"What makes you fancy that the Bible would render you happy?" enquired the Black.

"Because I used to read it when I was a lad, and I remember that it contains many good sayings," answered Splint. "Besides, it declares somewhere that there is hope for sinners who repent; and I should like to keep my eyes fixed at times upon God's own promise. I am sure that my mind would be easier; for though I know that the promise is given, yet I feel a desire to repeat it over and over again to myself—and also to learn whether God ever forgave any one who was so bad as I am."

"You shall have a light and a book," said the Blackamoor.

"Oh! you are jesting—you are deceiving me!" cried Splint. "But that would be so cruel, sir, on your part—"

"I am not jesting—the subject is too serious to be treated lightly," was the answer: then, making a sign to Wilton to step forward, he took from the basket which that dependant carried, a lamp already trimmed and a couple of books. "There is a volume of Tales—and there is the Bible," he continued: "take whichever you prefer."

"The Bible, if you please, sir," cried Splint, eagerly, while his countenance denoted the most unfeigned joy. "I know not how to thank you enough for this kindness!"—and tears again started from his eyes.

"Had you chosen the Tales, you should not have had either book or light," said the Black.

Wilton now gave the prisoner a plate containing bread and cold meat, and a bottle of water, while Cæsar lighted his lamp; and the door was then again closed upon him.

"That man is already a true penitent," whispered the Blackamoor to Wilton. "Let us now visit his late companion in iniquity."

The party proceeded to the next cell, in which Joshua Pedler was confined, the two armed dependants stationing themselves in such a manner as to be visible to the inmate of the dungeon when the door was opened.

"Thank God! you are come again," he cried, starting up from his bed the moment the light flashed in upon him. "But why do you come with swords and pistols in that fashion?" he demanded, savagely.

"In case you should offer any resistance," answered the Blackamoor. "I do not choose to put chains upon you; and therefore I am compelled to adopt every necessary precaution when I visit you in this manner."

"I really would not harm you, sir—I would not for the world," said Pedler, in a milder tone. "You are not cruel—though severe; and I feel very grateful to you for not giving me up to justice. I hope you are not offended with me for speaking as I did: I try to be patient—I endeavour to be mild and all that—"

"What is it, then, that irritates your temper?" enquired the Blackamoor.

"My own thoughts, sir," answered Josh Pedler, bitterly. "Just before I heard the key grating in the lock, I was a thinking what a fool I have been for so many years, and how happy I might be, perhaps, if I was a labouring-man."

"You are sorry that you have been wicked?" observed the Black, interrogatively.

"And so would any one be when he comes to be locked up here in the dark," returned the man. "It is all very well when one is at liberty, and has friends to talk to, and plenty of drink; because company and gin can prevent a body from thinking. But here—here—oh! it is quite different; and my opinion is that a dark dungeon is a much worse punishment than transportation—leastways, judging by all I've heard from men which has been transported and has come home again when their time was up."

"Would you rather be transported at once, then—or remain here?" enquired the Blackamoor.

"I would sooner remain here, for several reasons,"

said Pedler. "In the first place, I do n't want to get into bad company again; because I'm afraid I should go all wrong once more;—and, in the second place, I know that the thoughts which I have are good for me, though they're not pleasant."

"But if you could this minute join some of your old friends to drink and smoke with them, would you not gladly do so?" asked the Black.

"I scarcely know how to answer you, sir," replied Pedler, musing. "I am afraid I might—and yet I am very certain that I should be a fool for my pains. I would sooner earn an honest living somehow or another: I should like to have good thoughts—But that is impossible—impossible!" he added, shaking his head gloomily.

"Why is it impossible?" demanded the Black.

"Because a man to have good thoughts, must do something that is good," was the prompt rejoinder; "and I have been a wicked fellow for so many years. I wish I had been good; but it is too late now!"

"It is never too late to repent," said the Blackamoor.

"I know that the Bible promises that," observed Pedler; "but then people would never believe that a rascal like me could become good for any thing. Besides, after all that has happened, I do n't hope for any opportunity of showing that I feel how stupid I have been to lead such a life as I have done. Who would trust me with any work? what honest person would associate with me? It's no use questioning me, sir: you see that even you yourself do n't feel comfortable in visiting this place, since you come with armed people."

"If you could obtain your liberty by killing me, would you not do it?" asked the Black.

"As true as you are there, I would not harm a hair of your head!" cried Josh Pedler, emphatically. "I shudder when I think of that dreadful business down at the Cottage vinder—in fact, I can't bear to think of it. I do n't say that I am actually afraid at being in the dark; but darkness causes terrible thoughts. It seems as if the mind had eyes, and could n't shut them against particular things;—and now that I have found out this much, I should be a long time before I did a wrong deed again, even if I was turned out into the midst of London this very minute without a penny in my pocket."

"What would you do if you were set free this moment?" demanded the Blackamoor. "At the same time, do not suppose that you are about to have your liberty."

"I am not mad enough to fancy it possible," replied Josh Pedler. "But if such a thing did happen, I would go to Matilda—the gal that I spoke to you about, sir—"

"And who is now in a comfortable position," added the Black.

"Yes—thanks to your kindness," said the man; "and I should like you as long as I lived, if it was only on account of what you have done for her. But, as I was going to tell you—supposing I was set free, I would take Tilda with me into the country—as far away from London as possible; and then I'd change my name, and try to get work. Ah! I should be happy," he continued, with a profound sigh, "if I could only earn enough to keep us in a little hut. But do n't make me talk in this way any longer: I feel just—just as if I—I was going to cry."

The man's voice became faltering and t

as he uttered these last words; and his lashes were moistened with tears.

"Should you feel pleasure in writing a letter to Matilda?" asked the Blackamoor, in a kind tone.

"Yes — above all things!" eagerly cried the criminal. "I am no great penman; but she could make out my scribbling, I dare say;—and it would do me good to give her some proper advice—I mean, just to let her know what my thoughts is at times. Besides, now that I'm separated from her, I find that I liked her more—yes—a good deal more than I used to fancy I did; and I should be glad to beg her forgiveness for what I made her do when I was sick and in want."

"You shall have a light and writing-materials," observed the Black.

"You are a good man—I feel that you are, sir!" exclaimed Josh Pedler, the tears now trickling down his cheeks. "If I had only fallen in with such a person as yourself, when I was young, I should n't have turned out as I did. But though people may never know that it is possible for a fellow like me to alter, yet altered my mind is—and I don't look on things as I used to do."

Wilton gave Josh Pedler a supply of food, a lamp, and writing-materials, the dungeon already containing a table in addition to the other necessary but plain and homely articles of furniture. The criminal was overjoyed at the indulgence shown him on the occasion of this visit; and he saw the door close upon him with feelings which seemed to have experienced a great relief.

